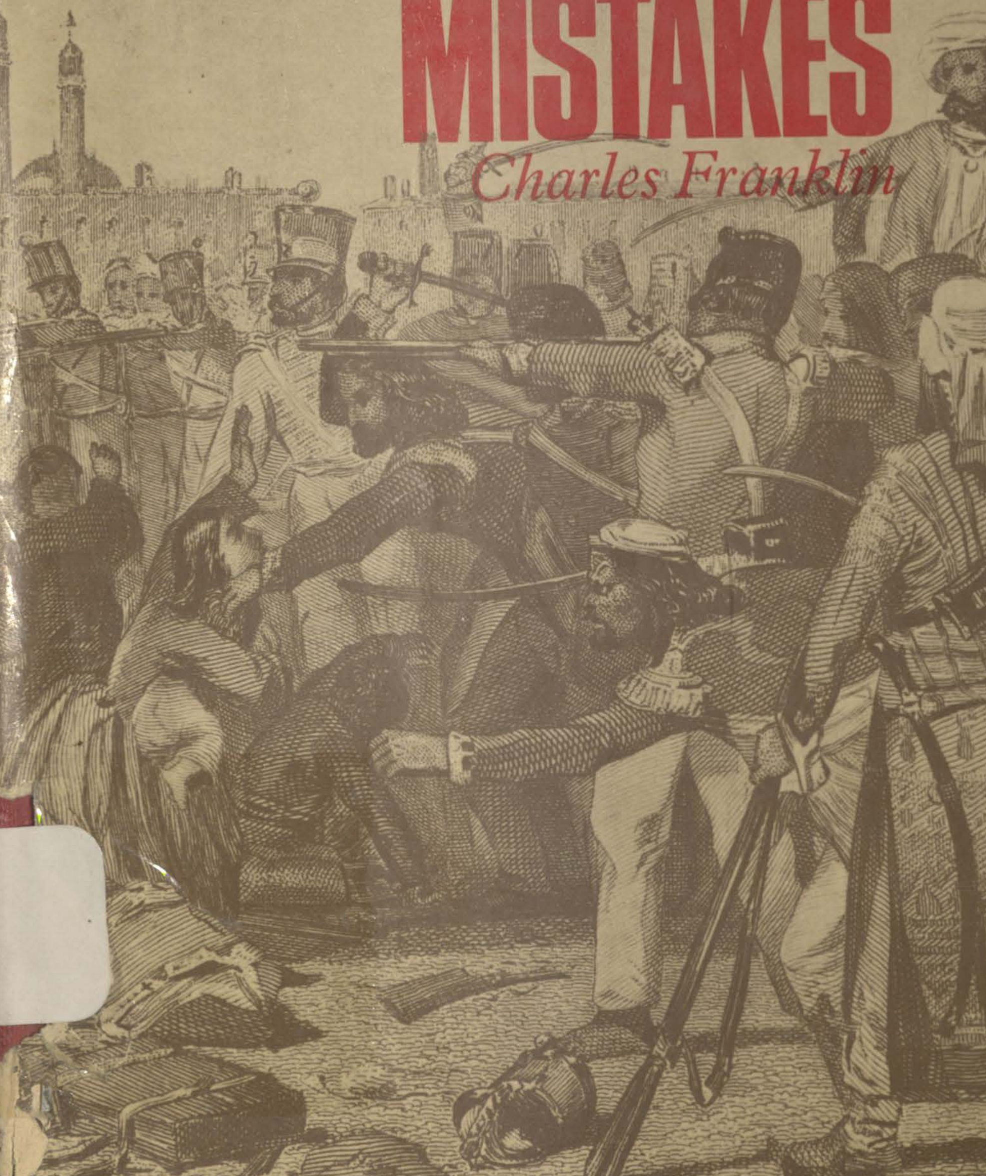
THE WORLD'S GREATEST MISTAKES

Charles Franklin



THE WORLD'S GREATEST MISTAKES

The history of civilisation is not only a record of man's triumphs. It is also the story of his mistakes and failings – his greed, his arrogance, the self-deception which springs from an unshakable conviction that he is right, and the errors which arise from a lack of either knowledge or foresight. This fascinating book is full of instances which show man at his worst and at his best – progress is often the result of the spirit of man, confronted with disaster, finding new strength to go forward.

Man's mistakes have sometimes led to immediate disaster, as in the case of the Spanish Armada, the loss of the *Titanic*, Hitler's lunatic invasion of Russia, and Japan's treacherous attack on Pearl Harbour. At other times disaster was slow in coming but no less terrible, a legacy of centuries of injustice and oppression like the Slave Trade, or the smouldering resentment that erupted in the Indian Mutiny and the American Revolution.

And sometimes these very mistakes have led to results which have enlarged man's horizons and brought unexpected benefits. Columbus had no idea that a quarter of the world lay between him and the Far East. Bonaparte regarded Louisiana as a tiresome liability in a distant continent and didn't realise that he was selling to the United States – for a pittance – a half of the territory which makes up that great nation today. Louis XIV, in his arrogance and insufferable pride, revoked the Edict of Nantes and brought untold horror to the Huguenots; when they fled his oppression he was pleased to see them go, not understanding what a benefit he was bestowing on other countries to the detriment of his own.

Charles Franklin presents eighteen of these turning points in world history. He relates them with a clarity and a gift for narrative which will not only enthrall the reader but will also enlarge his understanding of the world and the condition in which he lives.

25/-

The World's Greatest Mistakes

1st Ed

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Charles Franklin

ODHAMS BOOKS

Contents

Illustrations

INTRODUCTION

So MANY MISTAKES have been made in the course of history that to compile a selection of what could be called "the greatest" involved some difficulty and much discussion.

I am well aware that my final selection may come under some criticism, and that a good case can be made out for the inclusion of the many other mistakes of history which are not recorded here. However, I believe that my selection of the errors, fallacies and blunders of mankind are formidable enough to justify the title of the book.

Some mistakes, such as the Atlantic slave trade, have had terrible consequences. Others, such as Columbus setting out for India and discovering the New World, had unexpected and fruitful results. Moltke's military blunders in France in August 1914 and the interception of the Zimmermann Telegram were welcome events for Britain, but were nevertheless mistakes which had great and long-lasting consequences.

Many books were consulted during the writing of this work. A selection will be found at the end of the book, nearly all of which are readily available to the ordinary reader who may want to pursue a particular subject.

Charles Franklin,
Salisbury House, Hove



Soldiers of the Cross

Whatever else might be said about the Crusades, they were doubtless the most romantic and fascinating events of the Middle Ages.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries each succeeding generation beheld an army of Crusaders gathering from all parts of Western Europe and setting out for the Holy Land to reclaim the most sacred places of Christendom from the infidel Turk – an exciting and perilous adventure from which many never returned. Those who died were assured of swift translation to eternal bliss and the returning Crusader was for ever a hallowed figure, the great hero of his time.

Hosts of legends grew around the Crusaders. They inspired a whole literature, a whole culture of song and verse. Their mystique uplifted and thrilled an entire age, and succeeding centuries were dazzled by their romantic aura, their bravery, their chivalry, their pious idealism, their simple, burning faith.

This was not of course the whole story. The people in the ages of faith and romance not unexpectedly distorted the picture. The Crusades were a significant historical movement which had

important effects upon the development of Western Europe, not the least of which was the mingling of the relatively uncivilized soldiers of the Cross with the greatly more cultured Byzantine Greeks and the Arabs, resulting in a considerable enrichment of the civilization of Western Europe.

The Crusades certainly had their dark side, and brave though the Crusaders were, no one can pretend that they in any way resembled the shining heroes of legend. They were in fact a crude and savage lot and they perpetrated many horrors and atrocities upon the innocent inhabitants of the countries they visited in order to prosecute their holy wars.

The initial cause of the Crusades lay in the threat by the Seljuk Turks to the East Roman Empire.

The ancient Roman Empire had split into two – the western half centred on Rome and the eastern half on Constantinople. The Western Empire for various reasons disintegrated, while the Eastern Empire did not. At Rome the Latin or Papal Church eventually inherited the power of the Caesars, the last of whom was deposed in A.D. 476.

But the Eastern or Byzantine Empire was the true successor of Rome. Its language and civilization had always been Greek and it flourished for a thousand years after the fall of Rome as one of the most splendid and cultured societies the world has ever known. Constantinople was the world's centre of learning, art, commerce and civilization at the time when the rest of Europe was sunk in semi-barbarism. It was the guardian of both Christianity and of classical civilization during those times. It was the most magnificent city in the world, its wealth and splendid buildings being unequalled anywhere on the earth according to Benjamin of Tudela who visited Constantinople in the year 1101, and was one of the most widely travelled men of his time.

The fall of the Western Empire had brought chaos to Western Europe, and peoples who for centuries had enjoyed Roman peace and prosperity slipped into the Dark Ages of anarchy and disruption. Their standard of living fell, and the culture, knowledge and skills of Greece and Rome were nearly forgotten. Only slowly as the centuries passed did the growing nations of Western Europe recover something of the great Roman past. Feudalism emerged. The Papacy grew in strength and was the only stabilizing power in the west.

But in the east Constantinople maintained both culture and civilization. Though ringed with foes, it was wealthy, prosperous and efficiently governed. The Roman law and system of government were developed and extended. The standard of living in Western Europe was poor and backward compared with Byzantium, Egypt and Persia, who regarded the people of Western Europe as "unwashed barbarians". As for the west, it looked at the east with a mixture of wonder and envy.

In Western Europe the Frankish and Germanic nobles, the men who were to lead the Crusades, were the descendants of the barbarians who invaded and destroyed the crumbling Roman Empire.

These nobles were mainly illiterate and spent their whole lives fighting petty internecine wars with each other. They have gone down in history as men of unsurpassed courage, though it is worth noting that these well-armoured knights usually survived their wars unscathed, while their relatively unarmed common soldiers, bound to fight for their lords as part of their feudal commitment, were usually slaughtered wholesale.

The Papacy in particular regarded these vicious squabbles with concern.

Christianity was still semi-pagan, and quite irreconcilable with Christianity as we understand it today. The Christian of the eleventh century was a superstitious fanatic. Both the Christian and the Moslem worlds had abandoned Christ's teaching on the subject of the brotherhood of man; a man was only your brother if he professed your particular religious faith.

The Roman Church and the Greek Church at Constantinople were divided on many aspects of doctrine, but they recognized each other as Christian. There was not the deep division which later developed between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Their main conflict was the question of leadership. The Bishops of Rome had long claimed to be the leaders of Christendom. This had been strongly contested by the Greek Church, which greatly resented the crowning of the Holy Roman Emperors by the Popes in the tenth and eleventh centuries. These Frankish and German princes were never recognized by the Eastern Empire as the successors of Rome which the west pretended they were.

Although there were many differences of doctrinal emphasis

between the Greek and Roman Churches, the main difference between them was that at Constantinople the Emperor himself was the head of the Church. The eastern Church was a more secular body and did not control education and the offices of states as it did in the west. One of the results of this was that the Byzantine Empire was run by an efficient professional bureaucracy.

But for both churches Jerusalem was the centre of the world. It was the holiness of Christ's city which made the appeal of the Crusades such a powerful one to the people in the Age of Faith.

Ever since the fourth century, when shrines were built over the Holy Sepulchre, pilgrimage to Jerusalem was considered a unique act of Christian devotion which would ensure the pilgrim a place in Heaven. The Arabs had captured Jerusalem in the seventh century, but they shared the Christian's veneration for the places associated with the life of Christ. The holy places had in fact been in infidel hands for four centuries before Pope Urban II called the First Crusade.

The Crusade had originated from a call for military help from the Emperor at Constantinople, Alexius Comnenus, and the rescue of Jerusalem from the infidel was in the first place quite incidental to the movement. The eastern Church had economic and cultural ties with the Moslem world, whom it did not regard as a mortal enemy despite the frequent wars between them.

Constantinople had always been ringed by foes, but in the eleventh century a very formidable enemy, the Seljuk Turks, appeared, and in 1071 defeated the Byzantine army at the Battle of Manzikert (or Melasgird). The Empire lost most of Asia Minor to the Turks who occupied the fortress of Nicaea on the other side of the Sea of Marmora. For years they overran the richest parts of the Empire and threatened Constantinople itself. In 1071 the Emperor Michael VII appealed to Pope Gregory VII for help, though in vain. In 1095 Emperor Alexius, who succeeded to the purple in 1081, addressed an urgent appeal to Pope Urban II to assist him in driving the Seljuk Turks out of Asia Minor.

What Alexius really wanted was mercenaries to fight the Turks, particularly the Norman and Frankish knights who were the best fighting men and the finest cavalry of their day. His interest in rescuing the holy places of Palestine from the infidel took second place to this.

Pope Urban recognized the seriousness of the Turkish threat to Christendom. He called the famous Council of Clermont and put before it the proposal of a holy war against the infidel, with the ultimate objective of liberating the holy places from their hands. "Let the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord our Saviour, which is possessed by unclean nations, especially urge you on, and the holy places which they are now treating with ignominy and irreverently polluting. Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre, wrest the land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves."

These words of the Pope were greeted by a great shout of, "It is the will of God!" The faithful were unmoved by the plight of Constantinople. What aroused them was the suffering of the Church in Jerusalem and the scandal of the holy places being in the unclean hands of the Turk. Very few of them were sufficiently acquainted with world affairs to know that Jerusalem had been occupied by the infidel for hundreds of years.

Urban had more than one reason for calling the Crusade. He was aware of the urgent necessity of employing the savage and warlike propensities of the Franks and the Normans, whose thirst for lands of their own was one of the great problems of feudal Europe. The Pope conceived the brilliant idea of finding a moral justification for the theft of others' land in distant places, and the passion for fighting and plunder which characterized so many of his faithful flock. An enemy had to be invented, and for the eleventh century it was the Moslem infidel, the Saracen – what better enemy could there be than the enemy of Christianity itself? The Saracens and the Jews fitted this rôle perfectly, for they represented the Devil incarnate to the mediaeval world. So far as the Jews were concerned, a similar rôle has been maintained by the naïve thinkers of more recent times.

Crusading was chivalry on the offensive. Chivalry imposed upon men the necessity of defending what was right. Crusading imposed upon them the necessity of fighting what was wrong. It provided the savage, half-civilized knights of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, whose very life was bloodshed and slaughter, with a perfect alibi for pursuing their blood-thirsty ways. No better excuse has ever been invented for gratifying the lust for fighting and butchery – after which they could justifiably fall sobbing at the altar of Christ, spattered with blood, believing that the

slaughter of the infidel was a holy thing, pleasing to the Saviour of mankind, that they were in fact "red from the winepress of the Lord".

Combined with the invigorating slaughter, there was great loot to be had on the Crusades. It was no wonder they were so popular with the barbarian knights of feudal Europe.

The Crusades were the church's attempt to sanctify the feudal instinct for private war, as it was easier to consecrate this boundless craze for fighting than to curb it, and for centuries the triumphant Arab peoples had been threatening Europe. Already they occupied Spain. The Crusades was part of the counter-attack. The intention was to spread Christianity and widen the power of the Roman church. The Papacy wished to bring the Holy Land under its sway, conquering it with the soldiers of Christ. In the eleventh century the Arabs and Turks were a disorganized force often engaged in fighting each other: the actions and atrocities of the soldiers of the First Crusade succeeded in uniting the whole Moslem world against Christendom with dire and terrible consequences for Europe.

It has to be acknowledged that the Crusade idea exerted an immensely powerful stimulus on the mind of eleventh-century man, whose faith was simple and unquestioning, and who was as yet untroubled by the doubts and sophistries which were inspired by the widening knowledge and culture of the succeeding centuries. It is difficult for us to imagine the state of mind which made men forsake all earthly things and hasten to the Holy Land in desperate urgency and in a spirit of wild elation as though Jesus Christ was being betrayed and crucified afresh and that they could rescue him.

Inevitably the Crusades attracted more than the devout warrior and the romantic follower of the faith. There also flocked to the armies of the Cross ne'er-do-wells wishing to escape responsibilities at home, and criminals of all kinds. Urban in fact made a particular appeal to criminals to become soldiers of Christ as a certain way of ensuring forgiveness of sins and immediate admission to heaven.

Discontented knights and nobles who hoped to gain principalities in the East – for had not His Holiness said: "Wrest the land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves"? – also joined the Crusades, as did traders and merchants who sought to exploit new markets in the East. The powerful Italian trading cities of

Venice and Genoa had their fingers in the pie. They helped to finance the Crusade in order to open up new and rich trading centres in the eastern Mediterranean. Business, rather than the rescue of the holy places, was their motive. The famous thirteenth-century explorer Marco Polo belonged to a Venetian family which had made a vast fortune out of the Crusades.

The First Crusade falls into two parts – the Crusade of the People and the Crusade of the Princes.

The People's Crusade was led by Peter the Hermit, who was popularly believed to have originated the idea. Though there is little ground for this belief, Peter the Hermit was certainly one of the leading figures of the First Crusade. He was a great leader, a powerful personality and enormously respected. Said to be the son of a Norman knight, "his stature", wrote Gibbon, "was small, his appearance contemptible; but his eye was keen and lively; and he possessed that vehemence of speech which seldom fails to impart the persuasion of the soul". The common people revered him as a saint.

Peter the Hermit assembled a great host of common folk in France and from the banks of the Rhine and led them east through Bavaria, Austria and Hungary. Peasants, artisans, vagabonds, even women and children, answered the summons to go and rescue the Holy Sepulchre, two thousand miles away, confident that the Lord would sustain them during the long and weary journey, and then grant them a great victory over the infidel.

Comparing their journey with that of the Israelites, Gibbon wrote: "Might not the Christians more reasonably hope that the rivers would open for their passage; that the walls of the strongest cities would fall at the sound of their trumpets; and that the sun would be arrested in his mid career to allow them time for the destruction of the infidels?"

These first Crusaders were a motley and dangerous horde of fanatics who behaved so badly that they were slaughtered out of hand and in self-defence by the inhabitants of the countries through which they passed, so great were their excesses and depredations. The first victims were always the Jews. They were easy prey in the cities of Verdun, Treves, Worms, and in the rich cities of the Rhine. The Crusader mobs swarmed in their hordes across Europe, bringing terror, pillage and rapine with them. Sixty thousand

marched with Peter the Hermit. There followed another wave of a quarter of a million, an unruly and brutalized rabble, many of them the dregs of Europe's population who were giving up nothing by following the Crusade, and who ravaged the countries they passed through, claiming their actions were authorized by the Pope and sanctified by the Holy Cross.

Near Belgrade, which lay close to the frontier of Bulgaria, they were slaughtered in their thousands after a pitched battle with the Bulgarian forces who had no alternative but to defend themselves against these ferocious and dangerous invaders of their land. The remnants, led by Peter the Hermit, who had the greatest difficulty in controlling his holy army, fled to the Thracian mountains whence they were rescued by the forces of Alexius and conducted finally to Constantinople which they reached after four months on the road.

The good people of Constantinople stared with amazement and alarm at this ragged mob which appeared before the walls of their splendid city. They seemed "more numerous than the sands of the sea".

The Emperor himself felt constrained to succour them and beg them to await the arrival of their better-armed comrades who were on their way. But the impatience of the fanatic hordes knew no bounds. Their only wish was for boats to cross the Bosphorus and continue their march to Jerusalem. Alexius persuaded Peter the Hermit, whom he received with honour and respect in his elegant Greek court despite his wild and tattered appearance, to wait the arrival of the Crusader barons and their armies. So far as Alexius was concerned, this was magnanimity itself, for in the meantime he had to feed the ragged multitude.

But the rabble had not the patience or wisdom of their leader and the majority of them, leaving Peter the Hermit at Constantinople, crossed the Bosphorus into Asia Minor. Believing themselves to be in "infidel country" they ravaged and killed, butchering many Greek Christians and committing such barbarous atrocities as roasting children alive on spits. A local Sultan, Kilif Asrlan, rounded up this murderous rabble and massacred most of them. Those taken alive were sold into slavery. It was said that of thirty to forty thousand Crusader-pilgrims, barely two or three thousand survived. This was in October 1096.

Thus ended the People's Crusade.

The true armies of the First Crusade took a year to organize and take the road to Jerusalem. This was no ordinary war; time was required to organize, equip and mount the armies for their long march. Modern students of this unprecedented military operation have been impressed by the excellence of the organization and the arrangements which were made for their transportation to Constantinople and the Holy Land.

Three main armies set out from Western Europe. Geoffrey de Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, with his brother, Baldwin of Boulogne, led the volunteers from Lorraine and Germany through Hungary to Constantinople where they arrived on 23 December 1096. The Provençal army, containing perhaps the flower of European chivalry, was led by Count Raymond of Toulouse and the Papal Legate, Bishop Adhemar. This army crossed northern Italy, then marched down the coast of Dalmatia to Durazzo, and due east to Constantinople which they reached in April 1097. A fine force of Normans and Franks under Bohemund of Otranto travelled down Italy, crossed the Adriatic to Durazzo and thence to Constantinople, also arriving there in April. Various other armies arrived, led by knights of distinction and renown, until a vast host of Crusaders had congregated outside the walls of Constantinople, greatly to the wonder and alarm of the citizens.

Each Crusader had a cross of red fabric sown on to his garments, and this in some mystical way gave him Divine protection. He was part of an army led by Christ Himself. The warrior-Christ was not alien to the mediaeval concept of Christianity.

The Crusaders proudly declined any help from Constantinople in their sacred war against the infidel, saying that it would not please God for the Greek Church to assist in the Crusade. They believed the Greeks to be effete and degenerate. The Greeks, for their part, looked upon the Crusaders as uncivilized barbarians. Byzantium was proud of its great heritage. At Constantinople there was an intellectual aristocracy bound together by their devotion to Hellenistic culture. While western Europe had all but forgotten the learning and culture of the great past, Constantinople had nurtured and preserved it. It was no wonder they looked down upon these savage Crusaders, ignorant, unlettered, some of whose leaders could not even read or write, who possessed nothing

but a burning, naïve faith and an unquenchable lust for warfare. The people of Constantinople were much more impressed by the Crusaders' greed and duplicity than by their piety.

During the year 1097 the Crusaders' armies converged upon Constantinople from all the countries of Papal Europe. Eventually the army was so vast that the Byzantines became uneasy and alarmed. Indeed it required all of Alexius's powers of diplomacy and intimidation to prevent the Crusaders combining to loot the capital itself. It was estimated that the Crusaders totalled more than half a million, though 150,000 would perhaps be a more accurate figure.

Our authority for the conduct of the Crusaders at Constantinople in 1096–7 is Anna Comnena (1083–1148), the favourite daughter of Emperor Alexius I. This accomplished and cultured Byzantine princess was educated in the Greek sciences and philosophies, studied medicine and was the physician-in-chief at the biggest hospital in Constantinople. Later, after her father's death, she tried unsuccessfully to seize power, was stripped of her property and fortune and retired to a convent where she employed her time writing the *Alexiad*, a history in Greek of her father's life and reign (1081–1118). Anna Comnena also wrote medical treatises. She was a talented and brilliant woman.

Anna wrote an intriguing account of the visit of the first Crusaders to Constantinople. She was a girl at the time, and to her the Crusaders were barbarians. Not only was she repulsed by their gluttony and unclean personal habits, but she thought they were "unspeakably boring", and tiresomely garrulous, though with nothing intelligent to discuss – these legendary soldiers of the Cross from Lombardy, Aquitaine, Germany and England, these knights of shining chivalry whose fabulous exploits in the Holy Wars were sung down the centuries and who became the most glamorous and envied warriors of their age. This observant and fastidious Byzantine princess, who had ample opportunity of observing them first hand, saw nothing glamorous about them. While she admitted that many of the common soldiers were piously sincere in their desire to free the holy places from the infidel, her judgement of their leaders was that they were greedy and ambitious and were on the Crusade only for what they could get out of it.

Anna, in the confidence of her father the Emperor, was speaking

for the Byzantine court as well as herself when she expressed this very low opinion of the Crusaders and their leaders.

Alexius was embittered because he failed to persuade the Crusaders to deal with Asia Minor first and force the Turks back. The leading knights had no such intentions: their aim was Palestine, where they hoped to carve out principalities for themselves and control them by right of conquest. That, to them, was what the Crusade was really about, though the rescue of the holy places was part and parcel of their design. Bohemund, the real leader of the Crusade, had had an eastern principality in his mind's eye right from the start.

In the spring of 1097 the Crusader hosts crossed the Bosphorus and began a hard march over Asia Minor. Nicaea was captured in June and in October siege was laid to the rich and important city of Antioch, which was not taken until the June of the following year. The Crusaders were then in turn besieged by a fresh Moslem army. There were internal quarrels among themselves and the enterprise came near to disaster.

The Crusaders' morale was so low that a miracle was essential to restore their spirits. This duly occurred in the shape of a rusty old piece of iron discovered under the pavement of one of the churches at Antioch which some inspired genius immediately proclaimed to be the Holy Lance, the very one which had pierced the Saviour's side as He hung on the Cross. There was wild and hysterical joy and the Holy Lance was covered with kisses and bathed with tears. Immediately the demoralized Crusaders were revitalized and inspired with fresh zeal and passion anew to continue their holy task. They won a decisive victory and marched south to Jerusalem rejoicing. The timely arrival of reinforcements from Genoa doubtless also made a contribution to their change of fortune.

On 9 June 1099 the Crusaders at last reached Jerusalem which they immediately besieged. By the middle of July they had penetrated the city.

The massacre which followed constitutes one of the greatest crimes of history. It is certainly the worst stain on the Crusading movement and puzzled many people who looked upon the Crusaders as chivalrous soldiers, even if they were fanatics. In Jerusalem they behaved like the worst kind of barbarians. They

shocked the Moslem world into unity and determination to avenge themselves upon these savages from Western Europe.

When they broke into Jerusalem the Crusaders' frenzy knew no bounds. This was the moment for which they had been keyed up by all the fanatical preaching of their leaders and rabble-rousers. After they had slaughtered every Arab soldier in the city, including several hundred who had taken refuge in the al-Aqsa mosque and whose lives had been promised by Tancred, "the soldiers of Christ" then spread through the ancient city killing indiscriminately. They broke into houses, synagogues and mosques, butchering every human being – the women, the children, the old people.

Upon the Jews – the historical enemies of Christianity – fell their full fury. The Crusaders rounded up the whole of the Jewish community and drove them into a synagogue, which was then set on fire. Moslem priests and holy men were likewise butchered and their mosques and holy books obscenely profaned. This behaviour cannot be excused on the ground of military necessity, for women and children were massacred without mercy.

On 15 and 16 of July 1099 the Crusaders completely exterminated the whole of the population of Jerusalem, consisting of about fifty thousand people, the majority of whom were unarmed civilians, and on the evening of that terrible 15 July, while the massacre was raging and while the streets of Jerusalem were literally running in blood so that men splashed in gore as they rode through the murdered city, the savage heroes of the Cross went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and "sobbing with excess of joy", they pressed their blood-stained hands together in prayer, and bareheaded and barefoot they knelt before the stone beneath which had lain the gentle Saviour of the world, and covering it with their tears and their contrite kisses, gave thanks to God. It was said that the most ardent in the slaughter and rapine were the foremost in the procession to the Holy Sepulchre.

In this manner ended the First Crusade.

The Moslem world at that time was divided and warring with itself. So great was the horror caused by the Jerusalem massacre that Islam united against the Crusaders whom they regarded as fearsome and savage barbarians. The Crusaders lit a great fire of hatred in the Islamic peoples of the Near East. This enmity lasted for centuries, and was doubtless responsible for the Turkish

invasion of Europe and the destruction of Constantinople in the fifteenth century. Greece itself, the home of democracy, suffered degrading occupation by the Turks for nearly four hundred years, and did not get its independence from them until 1829.

The Crusaders had no sense of shame for the Jerusalem massacre. Nor was the western world filled with horror at what had been done. On the contrary, every faithful heart leaped for joy on hearing of the Crusaders' victory.

The Crusaders' leaders then divided up the country among themselves like any savage conquerors. Geoffrey of Bouillon became the first King of Jerusalem, and this insecure kingdom was buttressed by a small army of his followers, considerably aided by Italian traders with important commercial privileges. The Italian merchants were the only real gainers from the Crusade, although the new commerce they developed brought the West into permanent relationship with the Orient with many beneficial results.

But the Kingdom of Jerusalem was short-lived. Saladin reconquered Jerusalem in 1187 and all the fruits of the First Crusade were lost. Once more Christendom went into the attack, but now they faced a united Moslem world, welded together by their resentment and horror of the behaviour of the warriors of the First Crusade.

The Second Crusade in 1148 was led by Emperor Conrad III and King Louis VII of France. As usual the leaders quarrelled among themselves and the campaign ended in miserable failure.

The inability to recapture Jerusalem led to the Third and perhaps most famous Crusade (1188–1192), the Crusade of the Kings as it was known, in which Richard I of England, Philip Augustus of France and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa quarrelled, jousted and gave sparkling displays of war and chivalry, but accomplished little apart from the capture of Acre. This Crusade ended in a treaty with Saladin whom Richard Coeur-de-Lion seemed to like better than his fellow-Crusaders, and which was considered by some to be a betrayal of Christendom.

The leaders of the Fourth Crusade decided there was more loot to be had at Constantinople than in Syria or Palestine. Western Europe hated and envied the splendid city on the Bosphorus, and believed that Byzantine treachery had been responsible for the disasters of earlier Crusades.

In 1204 the Crusaders laid siege to Constantinople, took the city and sacked it. Much of the loot was taken by the Doge of Venice, the leading spirit in this operation which was undertaken apparently in order to finance the Crusade. The bronze horses now standing outside St Mark's in Venice were part of this loot. But many of Constantinople's most precious treasures of art and literature went up in flames during the sack of the city. The Crusaders divided up the Empire between them, and as a gesture of contempt set a prostitute on the Patriarch's throne.

Crusading had by now become discredited. Richard Coeur-de-Lion had been completely disillusioned by the behaviour of the soldiers of the Cross and their mercenary backers from the Italian trading cities. The sack of Constantinople shocked the world, and the Greek emperors were restored more out of a sense of shame than a desire to do justice. Jerusalem was irrevocably lost to Christendom, and later Crusades directed their attention to attacking Egypt. Commerce had become more important than the liberation of the holy places. Those who profited most from the Crusades were the merchants of Venice and Genoa. It was more profitable to trade with the infidel than to fight him.

After the looting of Constantinople in 1204 the eastern Empire began to crumble. Sustained by the Venetians, Constantinople continued for a century and more, awaiting the inevitable Turkish onslaught.

The Crusades were in one vital respect a total failure and a great mistake. Their intention was to Christianize the Moslem East. The result was the opposite. The Moslems, provoked by the Crusaders' barbarous atrocities, invaded and conquered the West, taking Constantinople in 1453 and setting up the Ottoman Empire which spread into Europe and at one time stretched as far as Hungary and the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

The disunity and backwardness of the Christian countries in the Middle Ages exposed Europe to centuries of peril and tyranny. The Balkan peoples were submerged for nearly four hundred years under the humiliating yoke of their Moslem conquerors.

When in the fifteenth century Constantinople realized the peril in which they stood from the formidable Turks who were planning their destruction, they called upon those whom they considered their friends for help – their commercial allies, Venice and Genoa

and the Christian nations of western Europe. After their experiences of 1204, they should perhaps have known better. The Italian merchants were too busy trading with the Turks to wish to intervene, and western Europe declined to help. Constantinople was taken by the Turks in 1453 after a long and bitter fight, and thus ended the eastern Empire, a great and irreparable loss to the culture and civilization of the age. The Turks renamed it Istanbul and made it the capital of their empire. Although Ankara is now the capital of Turkey, Istanbul still remains the most famous Turkish city in the world.

The failure to come to the aid of Constantinople was due, among other things, to western Europe's ancestral jealousy of the Byzantine civilization and their religious leaders' denunciation of the Greek Church as heretical.

The nations of western Europe had Constantinople on their conscience for the centuries during which they fought to defend Europe against the Turks. Further back in history still, the Crusaders' barbaric massacre in Jerusalem in 1099 was doubtless the spark which united the Moslem world against the Christian, and which had such dire consequences for Europe.



Columbus mistakes the New World for India

One of the most significant and far-reaching mistakes in the history of the world was that of Christopher Columbus who landed in the Bahamas and thought he was in India. When he discovered Cuba he thought it was Japan – a remarkable mistake with awe-inspiring consequences.

The great voyage of Columbus, by the standards of his age, was a failure and a disappointment. He had gone in search of the gold and treasure of the East, and found a few tropical islands. The expedition financed by Ferdinand and Isabella cost seventeen thousand florins, and though many complained of the expense this modest sum in time reaped a golden harvest for Spain.

The geographers of the days of Columbus believed that the world was a sphere, although many sailors still clung to the belief that it was a disc and if they sailed too far in one direction they would fall off the earth into space. It was thought that the earth consisted of two main land masses, Europe-Asia and Africa, and they believed that it was much smaller in extent than we know it to be

now. The eastern coast of China was believed to be at about the same longitude as where the eastern coast of North America actually is. It was thought that there was a short, if perilous way to the East across the unknown Atlantic.

It was upon this thesis that Columbus laid the plans for his historic voyage.

At the end of the fifteenth century man's knowledge of the world was limited to very little more than had been known by the Romans or the ancient Phoenicians. To the north only part of Scandinavia had been opened up, and Iceland was known. To the south geographic knowledge was bounded by the Sahara and the coast of Africa to a little south of the Equator, though the rough outline of Africa was known from ancient cartographers. In 1487 the Portuguese had sailed down the west coast of Africa and rounded the Cape of Good Hope.

But it was to the east and to the west where man's imagination and ambition lay. Most particularly he wanted trade with the Far East.

Marco Polo had reached Peking in 1275, and he certainly was not the first European to do so. Most of his predecessors were merchants who kept their trade routes secret. The silk and jade route to Cathay had been known since antiquity. Marco Polo also told the world about Japan, which he called Cipangu; the fabulous wealth of the Orient as described by him fired the imagination of Europe and was the direct inspiration of the great voyages of discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Maritime trade with the East had for centuries been the monopoly of the Arabs who had explored the Indian Ocean and beyond. Arab merchantmen traded with the spice islands and coasted up the China Seas to the ports of Cathay. They also sailed the Indian Ocean as far south as Madagascar which they colonized long before Diego Diaz "discovered" it in 1500. Only at the end of the fifteenth century did the Portuguese sailors finally discover the sea link to the Indian Ocean via the Cape of Good Hope.

To the Middle Ages India was a vague place, and the name was applied to a much greater area than the India we know today. The Indias were mysterious countries of wealth and wonder, and they included Burma, Thailand, Malaya and the islands of what was known as the East Indies. There was also India Orientalis,

presumably part of China, and Lesser India which included Arabia, Abyssinia and the countries bordering the Red Sea. These divisions however were vague and varied according to the imaginations of the map-makers of the day. In the time of Columbus the country of India was usually taken to mean the kingdom of Prester John, a legendary twelfth-century ruler somewhere in the Far East.

With the development of ship building and navigation, the fifteenth-century merchants and sailors were busy speculating about the all-sea route to India. The way around the Cape of Good Hope seemed long and perilous. They believed there was a westward route to the Orient across the broad, mysterious waters of the Atlantic, which would be shorter and more direct.

The great western ocean was being sailed upon again after more than sixteen centuries of neglect, dating from the destruction of Carthage by the Romans. If Carthage had been permitted to continue her maritime trade, it is virtually certain that her daring and skilful sailors would have discovered and opened up the coast of the Americas during the time of the Roman Empire, a matter which would have vitally changed the history of the world.

Instead the Atlantic was known in the Middle Ages as the Sea of Darkness. Few sailors dared venture upon it out of sight of land. No one knew where it led. It was desolate, empty; no trading ships traversed it, for beyond the Azores it was apparently unbounded by land. Westward from the Azores lay the terror and darkness of an illimitable ocean swept by impossible storms.

The twelfth century Arab geographer Ibn Idrisi wrote of the mysterious, windswept Western Ocean:

"The ocean encircles the ultimate bounds of the inhabited earth and all beyond it is unknown. No one has been able to verify anything concerning it, on account of its difficult and perilous navigation, its great obscurity, its profound depth and frequent tempests; through fear of its mighty fishes and its haughty winds; yet there are many islands in it, some peopled, others uninhabited. There is no mariner who dares to enter into its deep waters; or if any have done so, they have merely kept along its coasts, fearful of departing from them. The waves of this ocean, although they roll as high as mountains, yet maintain themselves without breaking; for if they broke it would be impossible for a ship to plough them."

The Azores, discovered in the fourteenth century, were then the

limits of European occupation in the Atlantic. To the west was the unknown. The Canaries were discovered by the Phoenicians and had been occupied intermittently ever since.

A romantic story was told about the discovery of Madeira. A certain Robert Machin about the year 1370 fell in love with a beautiful young English aristocrat named Anne Dorset (or d'Urfey or d'Arfet). Though Anne returned his love, her family would not permit the match, but forced her to marry a lord who had a castle on the shores of the Bristol Channel. Machin was thrown into prison for his presumptuous aspirations, and his pining mistress was shut up in her lord's castle. Machin was presently released, English law meaning something even in those days, and promptly abducted his lady love from the clutches of her husband. He sailed away with her to France where they planned to live in happiness and peace. But a violent storm raged for fourteen days and drove them completely off their course. They finally came to a pleasant island where they found sunshine, shelter and an abundance of the fruits of nature. While they were ashore another storm arose and wrecked their ship.

But there was no happiness for the lovers and their companions cast away upon this arcadia. Anne was filled with terror, believing the hand of God was turned against her, and so she pined away and died. A little later her lover also died of a broken heart. The rest of the party buried them under a spreading tree and put up a great wooden cross, then repaired their boat and put to sea, being cast up later upon the coast of Morocco where the Moors threw them in prison. Here they met a Spanish pilot named Juan de Morales, to whom they told the story. After his release Morales told what he knew to Prince Henry of Portugal, who in 1418 sent ships to the island of Madeira and colonized it. The first governor was Bartolomeo de Perestrello, whose daughter married Christopher Columbus.

The terrors which the Western Ocean held for the southern European navigators of the Middle Ages were in fact successfully braved by the Norsemen, who had crossed the Atlantic five hundred years previously. They discovered Iceland in A.D. 867, and in 933 Eric the Red visited the coast of Greenland. Newfoundland was discovered some fifteen years later by Eric's son, Lief. Lief then sailed southwards and discovered Nova Scotia, wintering

on a nearby island which he called Vinland, because there he found vines. We know it as New England. An Icelander named Thornfinn Karlsefne colonized Nova Scotia.

It is not known for certain whether these northern discoveries of the Norsemen were known to the geographers of Columbus's time. Vinland is not marked on Martin Behaim's globe produced at Nuremberg in 1492. Behaim marks Greenland as part of a little-known north of Europe. Nor is there any sign of the Norsemen's discoveries on the world map printed by Henricus Martellus in about 1489 which was supposed to have been familiar to Columbus.

If Columbus had known even vaguely about the Norsemen's voyages in the northern Atlantic, as some authorities think that he must have done, it is likely that he did not think they were of any great significance and could have little connection with his own proposed voyage, except in so far as to convince him that land did exist across the Western Ocean, as the Atlantic was known in his day.

Columbus was after all looking for China, not remote lands in the northern seas. He was more likely to believe in the realities of Behaim's globe, which though it indicated islands in the northern part of the ocean where the American seaboard actually is, it marked them with the word "Cathai", and indicated that they were in the region of Cipangu, or Japan. No suspicion existed in the mind of Columbus or his fellow navigators that in between Europe and Cathai was not only the immense continent of North America, but an even greater ocean twice as vast as the Atlantic. The world was indeed twice as big as Columbus imagined it to be.

Christopher Columbus was born at Genoa of a family of weavers. His father was a wool carder, a respectable Genoese trade. The date of his birth is uncertain – 1451, according to some authorities, 1446 according to others. His son's biography says that young Christopher went to the University of Pavia, where he studied astronomy, geometry and cosmography. Columbus himself, however, said he became a sailor at fourteen. He visited England and Iceland in a Genoese vessel. About 1478 he was in Portugal where he married Filippa Nomiz de Perestrello, whose father, as previously mentioned, was the first governor of Porto Santo, Madeira, in the service of Prince Henry the Navigator.

Columbus seems to have spent some time at Madeira where he

found much fascinating material among the nautical library of his father-in-law. On the waterfront of Funchal he listened to the stories of old sailors who talked endlessly of the mystery of the western seas, of strange lands beyond the Azores, of mysterious islands which floated on the ocean like rolling plains of green verdure heaving with the waves. Some had seen on the seas branches of trees unknown in the west; others pieces of wood carved but not with steel tools; others huge tree trunks hollowed into canoes capable of carrying eighty rowers; others gigantic reeds utterly unlike anything grown in Europe or Africa; others again had seen corpses of white or copper-coloured men whose features did not resemble the races of Western Europe, Asia or Africa.

To Columbus all these marvels seemed proofs that other lands existed on the other side of the Western Ocean, but he was convinced that these lands were only the prolongation of Asia, that in fact he had only to sail into the sunset, and keep on sailing, and he would come to the fabulous land of Cathay.

Among the stories which confirmed his belief was that of a pilot whose ship was driven across the Atlantic by easterly gales for twenty-eight days. The ship's company, terrified and exhausted, finally landed on an island where the natives went naked. They took in food and water and then returned to the east. It was a terrible voyage during which they suffered appalling privations. When they finally reached Funchal, the crew collapsed and all died but one who lived just long enough to tell the remarkable tale.

Other stories said to have inspired Columbus were to be found in the Old Testament, particularly a passage in Isaiah which, he was convinced, prophesied the western route to India.

Although Columbus boasted that the Bible was of more use to him on his signal voyage than maps, mathematics and reason, it is not to be supposed that he did not thoroughly prepare himself scientifically. It was the habit of the age to pretend that all true knowledge was to be found in the pages of Holy Writ.

Columbus met Martin Behaim, the great authority on scientific navigation and probably learned much from him, including his totally erroneous conception of the circumference of the earth and the extent of the Asiatic continent. He also corresponded with Paolo Toscanelli, the Florentine physician and cosmographer, who

is said to have written to him expertly on the subject, and supplied him with a map. He was also impressed by a book called *Imago Mundi* by the French writer Pierre D'Ailly, published in 1483, which in conjunction with Marco Polo's *Travels*, was largely responsible for forming his geographical ideas.

So Columbus started his great voyage labouring under three major misconceptions. Firstly he had grossly underestimated the dimensions of the earth; secondly he believed that the eastern coast of Asia – the legendary Indies – to be three or four thousand miles west of the coast of Portugal, whereas it is more than ten thousand miles; thirdly he was wrong in his estimation of the length of an equatorial degree, which vitally affected his navigation and his estimate of distances.

Columbus now had to find a patron. He was already in the service of King John II of Portugal and held a commission in the Portuguese Navy. He had sailed in an expedition to the West Coast of Africa and took part in the construction of the Fort of St George at El Mina. On his return in 1482 he submitted his scheme for reaching Asia by sailing westward across the Atlantic to King John. John was more interested in the route to India via the Cape of Good Hope, and under his flag Vasco da Gama made the round trip between the years 1497 and 1499.

King John referred Columbus to a Commission for Geographical Affairs which reported unfavourably after hearing his arguments. The King, however, did not agree with his advisers, and thought there was something in Columbus's ideas. With a perfidiousness not uncharacteristic of the monarchs of his day, John attempted to steal Columbus's project and sent a caravel* sailing westward to try the passage to Asia. This vessel, after cruising for some days beyond the Azores, came back, its crew frightened by the immensity of the ocean before them. Their return seemed a confirmation of the disbelief of King John's advisers in the Columbus project.

Outraged at this duplicity, Columbus left Lisbon for Spain in 1484. Some said he fled secretly to avoid the agents of the king, which suggests that John had not entirely lost faith in the project

*A light sailing ship of about 60–70 tons and 70 feet in length. They were broad-beamed, half-decked and usually had triangular lateen sails. The Portuguese caravels were said to be the best-found vessels of their day.

despite the return of his caravels. Others said Columbus fled to avoid his creditors.

A story is told of how he escaped at night from Lisbon, having lost his wife and his fortune. His creditors seized all his property, including his precious maps and globes, and even threatened his liberty. He left Lisbon with little more than what he stood up in, accompanied by his little son, whom he sometimes led by the hand and sometimes carried on his shoulders. He finally entered Spain, determined on offering his golden plan to Ferdinand and Isabella, the joint rulers of Castile and Aragon which they welded into the great country of Spain. But everywhere he found difficulties in his path. The Spanish sovereigns were in the middle of a bitter war with Granada, the last stronghold of the Moors in Spain, and had little time then for such fanciful ideas as sailing westwards to the Indies.

Columbus approached Genoa, his birthplace, and also Venice, but neither of these great trading republics would back his scheme. The Venetians in particular were against his plan, for their interest was to preserve the overland route to China. Columbus then proposed to seek the aid of England, and his brother Bartholomew, lately returned from a Portuguese voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, agreed to go to England to try to interest Henry VII in the project. The shrewd Henry Tudor was certainly interested and wanted to see Christopher Columbus in person.

In the meantime however Columbus was finally making progress at the court of Castile after having had his proposal rejected again and again. He had been actually leaving Spain for France hoping to convert the French monarch, when at a monastery he met Juan Perez, who had been Queen Isabella's confessor.

Perez was instantly converted to Columbus's scheme, and he wrote to Isabella in the most urgent terms with the result that Columbus was summoned to the royal presence. He arrived at Granada in time to see the surrender of the city on 2 January 1492 by the last of the Moorish kings.

Negotiations were begun with Ferdinand and Isabella. He believed he had much to offer. The very word Indies was synonymous with unbounded wealth, and Columbus was convinced that the monarch who financed his expedition would reap a golden harvest. In this he was quite right; his voyage opened up immense

riches for Spain, though the wealth did not come from the source Columbus believed it would.

When he appeared to have won his case at the court, Columbus began to demand conditions. He said he must be created Admiral of all the Ocean Seas and of the new lands with equal privileges and prerogatives as those appertaining to the High Admiral of Castile, the supreme naval officer of Spain; he must be appointed Viceroy and Governor-General of all islands or continents that he might discover. He also demanded a tenth of the profits resulting from his discoveries in perpetuity for his heirs and descendants.

These conditions were thought to be ridiculous and they caused much dismay and headshaking among his friends. Columbus was a foreigner and had no pedigree and it was absurd to put such conditions to the court of Castile where birth and breeding were essential to the holding of high office. "Singular demands for a beggar and adventurer," remarked the courtiers of Spain.

Negotiations broke down again. Once more Columbus departed for France, was overtaken and summoned back to the Spanish court where Isabella finally agreed to be his patron. An agreement was signed between Columbus and their Catholic Majesties on 17 April 1492 in which he was granted most of his previous demands, including the title of Admiral.

Inspired visionary Columbus may have been. But he certainly had his eye on the main chance and was eager to profit from his venture – indeed he made it a condition for undertaking it. Conscious too of being below the social level of the proud Castilians he was dealing with, he insisted on articles being drawn up which would give him the right to call himself "Don".

There were two main objects of his voyage – the discovery of Cipangu or Japan and an ambassadorial mission to the court of the Grand Khan at Cathay.

Ferdinand and Isabella gave him a royal letter of introduction to the Grand Khan, and then ordered the town of Palos to furnish him with two ships. It was easy enough to find them but getting crews for them was another matter. Most seamen flatly refused to sign on for so dangerous and mysterious a voyage. Even criminals offered indemnity refused to serve on the expedition, which was thought to be the wildest and maddest that anyone had ever heard of.

Once more Juan Perez came to the aid of Columbus and he used his considerable influence with the important maritime interests at Palos to back the voyage. Men were still difficult to recruit however. Many of them had to be pressed into service. They were much of a scratch crew containing many criminals and undesirables.

Three ships were eventually fitted out – the *Santa Maria*, a fully decked vessel of one hundred tons, and ship-rigged, with a crew of fifty-two under the command of Admiral Columbus, and two caravels, the *Pinta* of fifty tons with eighteen men under the command of Martin Pinzon, and the *Nina* of forty tons with eighteen men under the command of Vicente Yanez. Altogether those who embarked on this great adventure on 3 August 1492 numbered eighty-eight souls. Though this was crowding by modern standards, it was not so by those of the sixteenth century. Only the commanding officer had a cabin. The other officers had bunks against the ship's side while the crew slept on deck, except in bad weather when they slept below on the ballast. There were no such things as hammocks in those days. These were the invention of the natives of the West Indies.

The total cost of the expedition, including the three ships, the wages of the crew, stores and provisions, was 1,167,542 marvedis, or 17,000 florins. Perhaps £3,000 would be a modern equivalent of this. It was an astonishingly small sum for such an undertaking by any standards, and one which could easily have been furnished by many of the Castilian nobles with whom Columbus had been rubbing shoulders at court. Columbus would probably have had no difficulty in getting the sum from such a source, though of course he would not have had the royal authority and status, nor the ennoblement which Ferdinand and Isabella conferred upon him.

He possessed a compass and knew that it did not point due north except at about the longitude of the Azores. He was aware of the compass variations to the east of the Azores, but how it varied to the west he was only able to guess. He had no log and could only estimate the speed of his ship by walking along the deck abreast of a stationary object in the sea for a measured distance. He could thus only calculate the speed of his ship through the water, and not the distance it was actually covering across the

surface of the earth, for he had no means of calculating the currents, and probably did not know much, if anything, about such things.

For navigation he had the relatively primitive instruments of the day, such as the astrolabe, by which he was able to take a more or less accurate sighting of the sun. His only method of time-keeping was a half-hour sandglass. He was able to find his latitude fairly accurately from the altitude of the Pole Star.

Though his navigation was primitive and his knowledge about what lay to the westward quite incorrect, he probably knew that land had been discovered across the ocean both on a high northern parallel (by the Norsemen) and also somewhere about the parallel of 29° which is about the latitude of the Bahamas, according to the mariners he had met at Funchal. He therefore expected to find land of some sort between two thousand and two thousand five hundred miles west of the Canary Islands. These were certain islands – Antilia and others – which he believed lay between Spain and the eastern coast of Asia.

The story of the voyage of the three ships across the Atlantic has often been told. *Pinta* lost her rudder when three days out and they had to put into Tenerife for repairs. The westerly variations of the compass, mentioned previously, caused great concern, particularly to the crew, who were restive and difficult, if not downright mutinous. On one occasion they turned the ship round and headed for home against Columbus's orders. Only by convincing them that he knew a great deal more than he actually did, was Columbus able to quiet their fears and superstitions and maintain his westing.

They sailed through the vast plains of seaweed known as the Sargasso Sea. The weather was beautiful, the breeze temperate and from the right direction. As in a dream these half-hypnotized, half-afraid sailors of the fifteenth century watched the beautiful golden floating mass of gulf-weed, covered with berries and showing bright green leaves under the water, go by, as they were wafted across a smooth and sparkling sea which was "like the river of Seville", to another world.

The outward voyage lasted thirty-five days. During the last week of it they saw unmistakable signs of land – many birds, some migrating in great flights from the north to the south-west; tree

vegetation in the water; pieces of wood which had been carved by human hands; a branch covered with berries. Finally at ten o'clock on the night of 11 October 1492 a light was seen in the darkness ahead.

Immediately all sails were lowered and the little fleet awaited breathlessly for the dawn which when it came revealed an island lying in the blue sea ahead of them. It was the island of Guanahani.

Columbus made a ceremonial landing in full armour and scarlet cloak. Bearing the royal banner of Spain aloft, he claimed the island in the name of Ferdinand and Isabella, and christened it San Salvador. The existing inhabitants of the island, who greeted the strangers in shy, but hospitable manner, were not consulted in these matters. Thus was the bad example set of the European explorers greedily claiming and annexing everything they discovered.

The island on which he first landed now bears the unromantic name of Watling's Island. Whatever it was called it was the New World, and that historic landing on the 12 October 1492 opened up a new chapter in the history of mankind.

Columbus thanked God for guiding him to the portals of the East. He was in fact nowhere near the portals of the East, but in the Bahamas, many thousands of miles from where he imagined he was.

But Columbus was quite satisfied that he was in the Indies, and he gave the name Indians to the natives he found on Guanahani. The original natives of the New World have been called Indians ever since, and the islands of the Caribbean became the West Indies following the same geographical mistake which was made by their discoverer.

Columbus sailed on, discovering other islands in the Bahamas, and also Cuba. The finding of spices and pearl oysters satisfied him more and more that he had reached the eastern limits of Asia. Cuba he took to be Cipangu itself.

Off Haiti, or Hispaniola as Columbus called it, the *Santa Maria* went aground and was lost. Although he believed that he was now hot on the track of the Grand Khan himself, Columbus was anxious to return to Spain with the news of his great success.

He was first of all determined to colonize Hispaniola, so before he sailed away he built a fort of the salvaged timbers of the *Santa Maria* and left forty-four of his men behind.

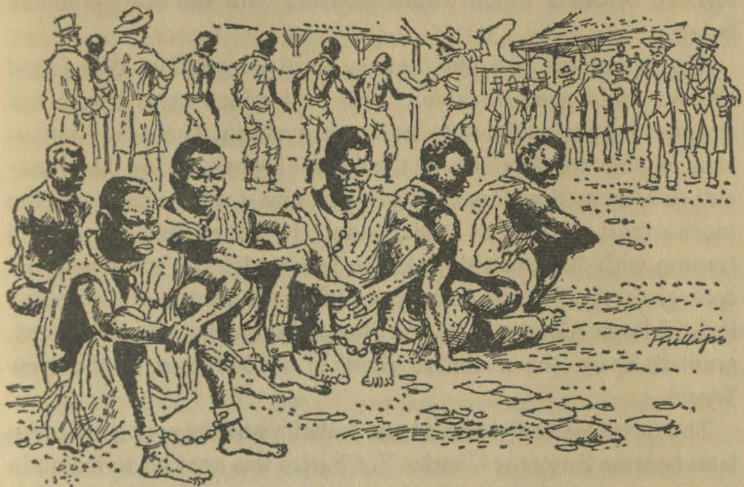
During the return voyage the two tiny vessels were separated in a storm, though they both finally returned to Spain where on the 15th of March 1493 the grateful monarchs received the returned voyager in triumph.

Columbus made three more voyages to the New World. His second and third voyages completed the discovery of the West Indies and took him to the South American mainland and the mouth of the Orinoco River. Before returning from his third voyage, he visited the colony he had left at Hispaniola. These soldiers of fortune however were in rebellious and unruly mood, and their worst instincts had been aroused by the discovery of gold. Provoked by Columbus's intractability, they seized him and sent him back to Europe in chains.

Although court favour had turned against Columbus, and Ferdinand had always been less enthusiastic about his exploits than the astute and strong-minded Isabella, the Spanish sovereigns made up for the insult of the colonials at Hispaniola by authorizing him to make a fourth voyage (1502–4) during which he sailed up the Central American coastline. He returned to Spain on 7 November 1504, too ill to go to court. Later that month his royal patron Isabella died. He himself died on 20 May 1506, never dreaming that he had discovered a new continent. To the end he believed that the islands of the West Indies and the adjoining mainland were part of the eastern coast of Asia.

But the enormity of Columbus's mistake soon began to dawn upon the explorers who now flocked across the western Ocean, and the truth rapidly became evident that a great new continent had in fact been discovered.

The name America first appeared on the maps drawn up in 1507 after the Florentine navigator Amerigo Vespucci visited Brazil and was the first to recognize that here was a whole new continent. In 1513 Balboa crossed the isthmus of Panama and was the first European to set eyes upon the limitless waters of the Pacific Ocean which lay between the New World and Columbus's dream of the east coast of Asia.



How the Slave Trade began

Christopher Columbus bears some responsibility for the starting of the Atlantic slave trade. Having discovered the peaceful islands of the Caribbean in 1492, he was up against the problem of making the new colonies pay. Believing their inhabitants to be suitable slave material, he exported five hundred Indians to Seville to be sold as human chattels. But Queen Isabella, to her credit, forbade the transaction and returned the Indians to their homes in the Caribbean.

Slavery in those days did not shock the conscience of the world. It was nothing new to the explorers of the late Middle Ages when they were opening up the coasts of Africa and the New World. The Arabs had been active in the trade for centuries, and maintained great slave markets at Marrakesh, Tripoli and Zanzibar. As early as 1442 the Portuguese when returning some captured Moors to Africa, received in exchange ten negroes and a quantity of gold dust. The Arabs' use of negroes as a kind of currency aroused the interest of the Portuguese, who were the first to establish forts on the West African coast for the purpose of

capturing negroes, which they at first sold as servants in Europe. The Portuguese saw there was good business here and they deliberately discouraged, and later forbade, any kind of trade in their African colonies which would interfere with the sale of human beings.

The Spaniards had not been in Haiti long before they found themselves in need of labour. The gold mines were there but it was proving very difficult to realize their worth. The native Indians were unable to stand up to the kind of work which the greedy and ruthless settlers forced upon them, and it was believed that the more robust negroes of Africa would be better material. But all trading with the Spanish colonies was under the strict personal control of the Spanish monarch. After the return of Columbus in 1493 Pope Alexander VI, the Borgia Pope who was a Spaniard, granted Spain the exclusive right of exploitation in the New World.

The successor to Ferdinand and Isabella was the young man who later became Emperor Charles V. Charles was anxious to maintain the enormous privileges the Pope had granted him in the New World and to exploit the new-found wealth. He was persuaded of the suitability of Africans as mine-labour, and in 1516 granted an exclusive patent to one of his Flemish favourites to supply four thousand negroes annually to Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica and Porto Rico. The Emperor's favourite, not wishing to transact the business himself, sold his patent to some Genoese merchants for 25,000 ducats. The Genoese themselves got the slaves from the Portuguese, who began the first regular traffic in human beings between Africa and America.

The first Englishman to go into the slave trade was Sir John Hawkins who came from a Plymouth merchant family. Hawkins made a fortune kidnapping negroes from the coast of West Africa and taking them across the Atlantic in his ship the *Jesus*, of Lübeck. There he sold his human cargo to the Spanish settlers in the Caribbean. Hawkins was an illicit slaver, for the Spaniards though anxious to trade with him were strictly forbidden to do so by their government at home. Thus began the endless battles between the Spaniards and the English over the rich, profitable lands of the West Indies and Central America.

Sir Francis Drake was another of the English freebooters who

saw to it that the Spanish colonists got all the slave labour they wanted from Africa. Negroes were also being transported to the west coast of South America to work as slaves in the silver mines. These negroes were shipped across the Atlantic to Jamaica, where those who survived the Middle Passage were "refreshed" before being taken to the Isthmus and then force-marched down the coast to the mines of Lima.

The English became very active in this foul traffic. Prohibited from trading with the Spanish American colonies in any other commodity – the Spanish home government finally agreeing to free trade in slaves, *asiento*, it was called – they pursued it with avidity, and in rivalry with the equally active Portuguese, carried it on with great profit for more than two hundred years. The prosperity of the ports of Liverpool and Bristol was initially based on the slave trade.

The morality of the slave trade not unnaturally obsesses those who write about this highly emotive subject today. This is not surprising now we are paying the price in terms of race-war and race hatred for the centuries of slave trading and slave owning. Our forefathers sowed the wind; we are reaping the whirlwind.

Slavery of course is as old as humanity. Throughout history the weak have become the slaves of the strong. The fate of prisoners of war was often slavery, and the economy of ancient Rome was based on it. The condition of the lord's subjects during feudal times in Europe was indistinguishable from slavery. The system had long been part of the social fabric and was accepted in the medieval world as one of the facts of life.

But with the African slave trade a new element was introduced – that of colour. For the first time in history people were enslaved because of the colour of their skin. This is what has set the African slave trade apart and given it its infamous reputation; and has led to grave consequences for the nations which once practised it.

To the slavers of recent centuries all negroes were potential slaves on account of their race, and when they were exported to the American South they were brainwashed into accepting slavery by being persuaded that they were an inferior human species to their white owners. This was very different from the slavery of history. It was naked racism and the plantation owners of the West Indies and America made it so. This is what we are paying

for now. Enslavement might have been forgiven, but not the racism which went with it.

The African slave trade was instituted for labour and economic reasons, and it is difficult to imagine the peoples in the centuries of intense colonial exploitation acting any differently in the circumstances. Nevertheless it remains one of the gravest blunders that man has ever made.

The first slaves went to the Spanish colonies of the West Indies and Central and South America. The trade was inflamed by Spain's refusal to allow any other commercial intercourse with her colonies except the transport of human beings to provide labour for their settlements. The fact that normal trading was forbidden to the maritime nations of Portugal and England in this rich and prosperous region only made the trade in slaves more brisk. Illicit trade with the Spanish colonies did go on of course – the ships that brought slaves to the Spanish Main did not return empty, but laden with valuable contraband.

By the end of the sixteenth century the slave trade was big business, and Portugal had even forbidden mining in Angola because it interfered with slaving which was more lucrative, for the Portuguese were exporting forty thousand negroes to Brazil each year to be sold to the sugar and coffee plantation owners; the population of Angola was not allowed to be diverted into other economic channels.

Gold Coast slaves were supposed to be of the highest quality; those of the Benin Coast were considered of lower grade. Thousands of miles of the coast of West Africa were raided, from St Louis in Senegal to as far south as Beneguela in Angola, as the demand for labour in the expanding colonial settlements in South America and the Caribbean was ever-increasing.

There were no permanent settlements on the mainland of what is now the United States until the early years of the seventeenth century, and here too the main problem of the early colonists was that of labour. Attempts were made to use the existing Red Indian population for this purpose but without success. Then the home country sent convicts who were sold as slaves to the colonists, but this did not really solve the problem which was particularly acute in the tobacco plantations of Virginia.

In 1620 the first negro slaves were brought to Jamestown,

Virginia in a Dutch ship. Thus began slavery in British America. It developed and flourished for three hundred years, and survived the arrival of independence. The Declaration of Independence did not apply to the slaves. At least it did not free them, though a number of states in the north abolished or outlawed slavery – Vermont being the first in 1777, followed by New York in 1779, Pennsylvania in 1780, Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1783, Rhode Island and Connecticut in 1784. In 1794 Congress made it illegal for American subjects to participate in the slave trade, and in 1807 made death the penalty for doing so.

Nevertheless the trade flourished and in 1790 there were 697,642 slaves in the United States out of a total population of 3,929,625. But in 1860 the eleven southern States which seceded from the Union contained no less than three and a half million slaves out of a total population of nine million, which shows how many slaves had been poured into the United States after independence, despite all the pious attitudes about the freedom and equality of all men in the land of the free.

It is reckoned that about fifteen million African negroes were shipped across the Atlantic into slavery between 1500 and 1865. The trade was at its height in the eighteenth century, when seven million slaves were shipped. This fell to four million in the nineteenth century. During these four centuries it was reckoned that an average of 40,000 negroes were enslaved and transhipped each year to the plantations and mines of North and South America.

The main traffic was carried on by the British and the Portuguese. But other peoples active in the trade were the French, the Dutch, the Spanish and the Americans who immediately went into it after the Declaration of Independence. Most of the European maritime countries had an interest in the slave trade.

It was a complicated and well-planned economic operation. Industrial goods, such as clothing, metal appliances, arms and ammunition, alcoholic spirits, beads and trinkets, were shipped on the first leg to Africa. These goods were used to pay for slaves which the various African kings and tribal chiefs of the west coast supplied. The slaves were usually kidnapped from neighbouring tribes or had been captured in war. Others were just hunted down in the forests like animals by armed parties led by Europeans.

In order to obtain the relatively worthless European goods which

the agents of the companies offered, the West Africans fell over each other to provide prisoners, decimating each other in the process and doing irreparable damage to their own civilization.

It sometimes took months to collect a cargo of slaves. They were finally loaded on board, crammed down below in the slave decks, usually about two feet high, chained together lying like spoons in one another's laps.

The trip across the Atlantic was called the Middle Passage because it was the middle leg of the triangular voyage which made up the slave ship's commercial operation. It has been calculated that there was a "cargo wastage" of about twelve-and-a-half per cent on the Middle Passage, which lasted about five weeks. Many more died in the harbours at Jamaica while awaiting sale, or while in the process of what was called "seasoning". It was reckoned that out of every hundred slaves shipped from Africa only fifty lived to become effective labourers on the plantations.

Losses in the eighteenth century were very high. John Newton, who was captain of a slaver from 1750 to 1754, said that on one voyage on which he carried two hundred and eighteen slaves they buried sixty-two on the passage from West Africa to South Carolina. He said the mortality rate in the Middle Passage in the eighteenth century was a quarter, and that of the sixty thousand slaves transported annually in English ships about fifteen thousand died during the Middle Passage.

There were usually between three and four hundred slaves on these ships, which were small fast vessels of about two hundred tons with a length of between eighty and ninety feet. The slaves might be bought in Africa at a price equivalent to about £3 per head, and sold in Jamaica, the principal slave market for America and the Caribbean, for five or six times that amount. Payments were nearly always made in kind. In Jamaica the slaver would load up with tobacco, cotton, sugar or rum obtained as payment and then sail back on the third leg of the triangle to Europe.

Liverpool was an important centre of the slave trade in England, and it was said that each brick in the city was cemented with the blood of a slave. In the early years of the nineteenth century slaves were fetching very high prices; a typical cargo of a Liverpudlian slaver, nearly four hundred slaves, fetched about £25,000 in the Jamaican market. The total net expenses of the voyage were

about £18,500, so that one of the owners, like Thomas Leyland, who had six other ships in the slave trade, made £6,500 profit. In the year 1798 there were one hundred and fifty Liverpool ships in the trade. Between them they carried 52,557 negroes into slavery at enormous profit for their owners.

In the early nineteenth century the English, after leading the world as the worst slave traders and becoming rich and prosperous on the infamous business, had an attack of conscience and in 1811 made slave trading punishable by transportation and then by death. Not only did England forbid its own nationals to continue in the trade, but it used its navy to stop other nations from slaving. Apart from being considered a gross interference with the rights (if dubious) of other nations, this sudden *volte face* was greeted with some derision abroad as a typical example of British hypocrisy. But the English campaign for the abolition of slavery was sincere enough and was led by many worthy men.

By its very nature the slave trade was of necessity a brutal one, for it is impossible to enslave human beings against their will without cruelty; and plainly a slave's lot was far worse under a white master in America than under a black master in Africa. The eighteenth-century slaver John Newton, who later became a clergyman and bitterly repented his slaving days, said that slavery was much more harsh in America than in Africa where it was endemic. Only in European-run plantations, he said, were slaves barbarously ill-treated and worked to death. In Africa a master was not permitted to ill-treat his slave or to shed his blood.

According to Newton the planters in Antigua always worked their slaves relentlessly, driving them to the limit of their strength, giving them as little rest as possible and just enough food to keep them working. A slave was thus reckoned to die of hard work after about nine years, and would not grow old and become a burden upon his owner, who would then buy a new one to take his place. This was reckoned to be the most economic use of slaves in the West Indies in the middle eighteenth century.

For all the fabled horrors of the Middle Passage, most captains of slavers were not cruel or inhuman, and the majority of them were credited with having no racial prejudice. They were in the trade for business and it was in their interest to get the negroes across the Atlantic with as little loss of life as possible; and it

must not be forgotten that the mortality rate among the crews of ships in this period was surprisingly high.

Many captains were particular about the hygiene of their ships and took as much care of their human cargo as circumstances permitted. It would be a mistake to picture them all as brutes. Discipline was harsh in ships in those days and sailors were punished mercilessly with the lash. Insubordinate slaves got the same treatment and perhaps worse.

The ignorant negroes when taken on board the slave ship were usually convinced that they were destined to be killed and eaten by the white men, and as many of the slaves belonged to warlike tribes such belief was calculated to provoke revolt.

So there was an ever-present fear of the slaves breaking free and butchering the crew, which they would have done, and some did. Much of the cruelty meted out to the negroes on slave ships was due to this fear, for the ship's crew might consist of no more than eighteen to twenty-five men. When the slaves came up on deck to stretch their cramped limbs and to perform their natural functions, they were usually on a long chain fastened to ring bolts set at intervals along the deck so that they were always under control, or perhaps a cannon would be pointing at them with a sailor standing by with a lighted match ready for the slightest sign of attack.

Meanwhile below some attempt was being made to clean out the filthy, stinking slave deck. The smell of a slave ship was one of the unforgettable odours of the day. It was carried on the breeze for miles and was a sure sign of guilt to the patrolling man-of-war in the days when slaving was outlawed. This smell was the result of much disease, and the unhealthy condition of many slaves on their arrival at the slave markets.

But while some captains were humane – if only because it paid them to be – some were monsters. There was sometimes appalling cruelty on these terrible voyages. John Newton witnessed negroes being mercilessly flogged to insensibility and death, and being tortured by thumbscrews for days on end. When slaves attempted mutiny the ring-leaders were likely to be slowly tortured to death, their screams being heard by all the cowed and terrified wretches below.

Instances were known of living slaves being fed to the sharks. Sometimes they were hung above the waves so that the sharks

had to leap up to bite pieces off the living negro, whose body would be jerked up higher to tease the shark. This was the true meaning of the phrase "feeding the sharks". The living victim was gradually lowered and fed slowly, piece by piece as the sharks leaped up at him. This was said to be a favourite sport among the sadistic crews of some slavers. Slaves unfortunate enough to become ill were likely to be fed to the sharks in this manner without any compunction.

The fate of the negro women on the slave ships was another cause of revolt. In a slave cargo there were always many more males than females. Newton said that the proportion in his day was two-thirds male. The women slaves and the children were kept in separate decks, and the young women invariably had the sexual attentions of the crew forced upon them, a matter which was often the cause of trouble among the male slaves. In most cases the captain and then the officers had first pick of the females among the cargo, and the crew were then let loose upon the rest of the women slaves.

Much has been written, naturally enough, about the sexual side of slavery. Many female slaves were bought for sexual purposes, some to go into brothels, others for personal concubines. Some Southern planters kept harems of coloured girl slaves, and as these Southern gentlemen were very often perverts with a taste for sadism or the kind of sex which revolts normal people, the fate of their young concubines was hardly to be envied. In New Orleans there was a brisk trade in shapely negro youths, known as "fancy boys" who were purchased by wealthy deviates for homosexual purposes.

Southern white women complained bitterly of their menfolk's passion for having sex with female slaves. "Under slavery we live surrounded by prostitutes," one of them said, adding that in every family half-caste children were born to the negro slaves with a tell-tale resemblance to the white children in the household.

Female slaves did not as a rule welcome such attention from their owners. John Newton remarked on the modesty and delicacy of most of these African girls, whose "submission" to their masters was quite unnecessary in any case – as chattels they had no choice in the matter – and in the southern States rape was no offence in law when committed against a slave woman.

The gradual suppression of the Atlantic slave trade led to an increase in slave breeding. Naturally much of this was hushed up, and whether it was carried on in the farmyard manner alleged by some is not known. But there is little doubt that many slave owners regarded their female slaves as breeding women and encouraged promiscuity in order that they should have as many children as possible, rewarding them for each baby they bore. The slave's offspring belonged to her master and were frequently a profitable side-line in large plantations where there were many slaves. Masters even sold children which they themselves had fathered with their slave women.

This degradation of woman and motherhood was one of the worst aspects of slavery, and together with the mountain of human suffering inflicted reveals a moral depravity on the part of these slave owners of the old South comparable with that of the Nazis of the present century.

Slavery was abolished in the British West Indies by an Act of Parliament in 1833 and the planters were given twenty million pounds sterling as compensation for the loss of their chattels. Emancipation was granted by stages and the slaves were finally freed unconditionally in 1838. Slavery continued in the United States until 1865, and was a bitter issue only decided by the Civil War. The United States is still suffering seriously from the aftermath of the conflict.

The slave owners of the southern States made slavery a racial issue, and this has created a lasting race problem in the South. They attempted to solve the problem of keeping control of their erstwhile slaves by persuading them that they belonged to a different and inferior race to the white folks and that the negro's ordained position in the world was that of servitude. The fact that they succeeded in inculcating this degrading belief into generations of "free" people accounts for the extreme bitterness of the American negro today.

The introduction of racism into slavery by the plantation owners was something quite new and transformed the whole aspect of slavery, which previously had not been a matter of race. The American negro slave could never hope for release from his bonds for it was ingrained in him that the colour of his skin made it impossible for him to aspire to equality. All previous forms of

slavery had been the result of force; capture, or defeat, or misfortune - never a matter of colour. The negro slave in darkest Africa was certainly better off than his brother on the plantations of the New World where the freedom of man was being preached.

The modern slavery in the Americas was a warped thing which introduced a new debasement and a new infamy into the long history of slavery. It was a mistake as great as anything which has been made in history, and one for which the world, and the United States in particular, is paying a heavy price.



The Spanish Armada

In the month of May 1588 the greatest fleet the world had ever seen assembled off Lisbon and set sail northwards to conquer and subdue the stubborn, heretical land of England.

It was a splendid sight. The enormous galleons with their towering decks, palatial poops, rows of gleaming cannon and ranks of armed men, rolling northward on the Atlantic swell, with bellying sails – sixty-five of them, accompanied by innumerable smaller ships, pastaches, zabras, oared galleys and galleasses, barges and store ships. Altogether there were one hundred and thirty ships, containing 30,656 men, of whom 18,973 were soldiers of Spain.

The great Armada was the pride and the instrument of King Philip II of Spain, the most powerful monarch in Europe. In it sailed the flower of the Spanish aristocracy, gallant men-at-arms and fearless mariners experienced at sailing to the very limits of the known world.

It was a great event. The world awaited the annihilation of insolent Albion and her bold, unblushing queen at the hands of mighty Philip and his invincible Armada. It never occurred to

anyone at the time that the great king of Spain, at whose name so many stood in awe, had miscalculated. But before the end of that eventful year, when the mighty fleet was scattered and nearly half of it sunk – only fifty-four of the hundred and thirty returning in shameful defeat to Spain – it was plain to all that a great blunder had been made.

Historians and naval experts are still discussing and analysing the cause of the defeat. Was it a misbegotten plan, a gigantic mistake, a great miscalculation, or was its defeat due to the brilliant tactics of the English navy, the weather, or even the espionage activities of Sir Francis Walsingham?

No clear-cut answer can be given to any of these questions. But mistakes are always made in warfare, though a signal defeat, such as that of the Spanish Armada, does not come about without someone making a major blunder.

To understand something of what happened it is necessary first to look at the two contestants in the mighty drama which took place around the British Isles in that summer of 1588, and also to examine briefly the background of the two countries involved.

Spain, as we have seen, was the creation of Ferdinand and Isabella, who welded the two mediaeval kingdoms of Aragon and Castile into one nation, and by driving the Moors out of Granada, gained control of most of the Iberian peninsula. By financing Columbus's voyage of discovery they opened up the golden era of the Spanish exploitation of the New World.

But the bright future of Spain was ruined by the dynastic disaster of the Spanish throne being acquired by the Habsburgs – a family whose activities upon the various thrones of Europe throughout the centuries did much to bring the idea of kingship into disrepute. If Ferdinand and Isabella had founded a strong royal dynasty of their own blood, the history of Spain would have been very different. Instead their weak-minded daughter, known as Joanna the Mad, married Philip of Burgundy, a Habsburg, who died young and the Spanish throne passed to his son, who became Charles V, Emperor of the great Holy Roman Empire, whose interests were anywhere but in Spain, and who used the rich treasure of Spain to fight his endless and fruitless wars.

The disgust of the proud and ancient aristocracy of Spain knew no bounds when this young German monarch was foisted upon

them. They were far from flattered to have a Habsburg king, a foreigner who could not even speak their language. To become part of Charles V's far-flung dominions was certainly not the destiny which the prudent and long-sighted Queen Isabella had in mind for Spain, the true interests of which lay in the Mediterranean and the New World. Charles V spent his life fighting the Reformation and looked to Spain for the money with which to do it. In particular was this battle centred in the Netherlands, and here lay the true origin of the clash between England and Spain.

Philip, Charles V's only legitimate son, was born in Spain in 1527 and received a Spanish education and upbringing. Charles realized that Spain was the brightest jewel in his crown and he did not wish his son to succeed to its throne with the same disadvantages as he had.

Charles V had been a lifelong opponent of Protestantism, but he was no fanatic. Like many of the princes of his time, he opposed the Reformation because he believed that the Roman Catholic faith was necessary to the maintenance of law and order in his dominions. The Reformation was rebellion against authority and the established order of things, and was regarded in those days rather as Communism is regarded today by many people. Philip was different from his father. Fanatically religious, he detested the Protestants, regarding them with loathing and horror.

At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign England was a weak power, small and vulnerable, despite her career of aggression in Europe during the Hundred Years War. England was still regarded with some suspicion in Europe owing to the centuries during which she had laid claim to vast areas of France, and the English monarchs were still styling themselves kings of France at the end of the fifteenth century. People in England continued to demand the return of the lost provinces of Normandy, formerly owned by William I, and Aquitaine, which had been the rich dowry of Henry II's queen, Eleanor.

Henry VII, realizing England's weakness, had allied himself to Spain by marriage. Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, had married first Arthur, Prince of Wales, and then at Arthur's premature death his brother who became Henry VIII. Henry's syphilis is believed to have been the cause of Catherine losing all her children except one, who became Mary I. The divorce

of Catherine naturally strained relations between Spain and England. But strong religious feelings were involved here. Henry's treatment of his much-injured queen, and his marriage to Anne Boleyn, were certainly not necessary to the establishment of Protestantism in England. Spain was the arch-Papal state and the Spanish Inquisition stood for everything that England abhorred.

It was natural that, with her background, tastes, and memories of her mother's ill-treatment, Mary should turn to her Spanish relations as soon as she ascended the English throne in 1553. Her youth had been filled with grief at the treatment of her mother and the destruction of the religion to which she was so devoted.

Mary was the first queen regnant in England, and it was immediately seen as necessary that she have a husband. Her marriage to Philip of Spain was a grave blunder on her part, in view of the delicate religious and political balance in England, but she saw it as the only way of ensuring a safe return of England to the bosom of Rome. Philip was twenty-seven, already widowed, a grave, gloomy and arrogant man, of imposing appearance. Mary was thirty-eight, neither young nor attractive. So far as he was concerned, the marriage was an affair of state, though Mary plainly fell in love with him and her infatuation had the rather sorry air of the belated passion of a maiden aunt.

A defensive marriage contract was drawn up by the English authorities, which gave Philip the title of King of England but without any power. Philip in fact took good care not to intervene in English affairs. He was not unnaturally the Protestants' ogre and was blamed for the persecutions in Mary's reign. Philip is credited by some with having urged moderation upon Mary – though if this was the case, it is curious perhaps that he never urged moderation in the persecutions elsewhere in his realms. There is little doubt that the responsibility for the persecution lay primarily with the English Catholics, now that England was received back into the Roman Church.

Mary was in fact a better Christian than most of her contemporaries, and wished to pardon all her enemies. It was said that she did not want the persecution. Her desire was to bring Spain and England together, and she married Philip with this object in view. But the effect of what she did was to drive the two countries farther apart and to earn for herself the undeserved name

of Bloody Mary. The blood that was shed in England in the name of religion during her reign was a drop in the bucket compared with that spilt in the savage persecutions in other countries during that time. A popular queen at first, her Spanish marriage alienated her from her people.

Philip left England after a year's residence when Mary's supposed pregnancy turned out to be dropsy. It was likely that she was suffering from hereditary syphilis and the last two years of her life were wretchedly unhappy. She was ill, she had been deserted by her husband, and had little control of affairs. She died in November 1558 at the early age of forty-two.

Meanwhile in 1556 Philip, at the abdication of his father, had become King of Spain, with its vast American possessions; of part of Italy, of the Netherlands, and of Franche Comté, a large province between Switzerland and France. He was the most powerful sovereign in Europe. A proud, melancholy man, with an icy manner, he worked hard at the business of kingship, as his father had done. A despot who believed in the divine right of kings, his personal rule was absolute. Everyone had to address him on bended knee.

On Mary's death, his first thought was to offer his hand to Elizabeth, but the new Queen of England flatly refused the offer, having no wish to repeat the mistake which brought her half-sister such unpopularity. All the same, when she heard that Philip had within a few months proposed marriage to Elizabeth of Valois, she snapped waspishly at the Spanish Ambassador: "Your master must have been much in love with me not to be able to wait four months."

There were several causes for the clash between England and Spain. Spain's power and wealth in the New World was threatened by swarms of English freebooters who were challenging Spain's exclusive rights to trade there which had been granted by Pope Alexander VI in 1493. After Mary's death, the English refused to recognize Spain's exclusive rights to the wealth of the New World. Both the British and the French colonized parts of North America.

This intrusion upon their private American empire was greeted with great indignation in Madrid. Spain laid claim to the American continent from California, across the unexplored territory to Florida, then south to include all the West Indies and the whole of Central and South America, with the exception of Brazil. This vast territory was considered Spain's absolute and exclusive province.

Although Philip II took these claims very seriously, they were hardly recognized anywhere outside Spain. The Spanish policy of forbidding all trading with their American colonies encouraged freebooting, smuggling and slavery. The Atlantic was busy with pirates and privateers of many nations taking advantage of the situation with the full approval of their home governments. Trading, such as it was, was on a shot-gun basis, but the best loot was to be had by preying on the treasure fleets sailing home to Spain and cutting off stragglers.

This organized piracy became so serious from the Spanish point of view that it developed into a grave issue between Philip and Elizabeth. In particular Drake's exploits under Royal Commission – on one occasion with twenty-one ships and 2,300 men he plundered Vigo and the Cape Verde Islands, then crossed the Atlantic to ravage the Spanish Main – were regarded by Spain as acts of war rather than piracy, which of course they were.

Mary Queen of Scots was another cause of dispute between the two countries. Philip did not actively support Mary's claim to the English throne – despite the fact that in Catholic eyes she was England's rightful queen – because she was a relative of the Guises and her accession to the English throne would mean that England would come under the sway of France, which did not suit Philip's policies. Elizabeth of course was well aware of this and she believed that Philip would not dare to attack her on this issue as he might well fear Mary Stuart's policies more than her own. Mary's execution therefore did not imperil Elizabeth. Nor did it benefit Spain's cause, for English Catholics tended to place patriotism before religion, knowing that the alternative to Elizabeth was Spanish rule which no one in England wanted.

Philip however was not aware of this. He believed that the armies of Spain would be welcomed in England as a liberating force from the Protestant terror. He went further in his delusions by launching a virulent personal attack on Elizabeth herself, permitting an exiled English Cardinal to issue a scurrilous denunciation of her in which she was called "an incestuous bastard, begotten and born in sin of an infamous courtesan, Anne Boleyn". Reference was made to her association with the Earl of Leicester "whom she took up first of a traitor only to serve her filthy lust. With the aforesaid person and divers others she hath abused her

body by unspeakable and incredible variety of lusts which modesty suffereth not to be remembered". Even in that age of forthright language, such vilification of their queen repelled the English, even those who had scant reason to love Elizabeth. It was indeed fatal to Philip's cause.

But the true origin of the war between England and Spain lay in the Netherlands. If Charles V had not burdened his son with this troublesome Protestant realm, Spain would have been able to have concentrated on her true interests which lay in southern Europe and the boundless regions in the golden west, and not in the sterile wars of religion in the Low Countries. Instead, her energies and her treasure were expended in fighting for the Catholic faith against the Protestants in the Netherlands where she was hated and unwanted.

England fought Spain in the Netherlands, not so much because of religion – though that was the spur in those days of impassioned faith – but to prevent her getting control of the Low Countries where England had many important economic ties.

The Netherlands had no natural ties with Spain, leaning more toward Britain, France and the German states. The situation was further inflamed by the presence and activities of the Spanish Inquisition in the country as well as Spanish troops under the Duke of Alba, who with his so-called "Council of Blood" was conducting a reign of terror. That Alba's activities were highly pleasing to his master was evidenced when Philip referred to the Protestants put to death by Alba as "vile animals such as the Anabaptists". In the same way Philip's hard and uncharitable character was revealed in the great satisfaction he expressed when he heard the news of the terrible Massacre of Saint Bartholomew in Paris.

Elizabeth after much procrastination had sent troops to the Netherlands, and in Spain plans for the building of the Great Armada were going ahead.

The original plan had been put forward by Admiral the Marquis of Santa Cruz in 1586, who made out an ambitious blueprint for the invasion of England by a vast force of 556 ships, carrying a total of 94,222 men, of whom 58,920 would be troops. This great invasion fleet would carry its own invasion barges as well as its invading army, together with vast stores of food and munitions.

Philip rejected the Santa Cruz plan as being too expensive, as well as too unwieldy an operation. After all, he had a good

army in the Low Countries under the command of the Duke of Parma. Why not just transport Parma's army to England, instead of carrying a whole army from Spain?

Whether the Santa Cruz plan could have succeeded, provided that Philip had been able to mount such a formidable operation, is an interesting speculation.

But the Armada plan as carried out seemed a more practical undertaking, and certainly more economic. One hundred and thirty ships sailed, of which sixty-five were galleons, twenty-five store ships or hulks, thirty-two smaller sailing ships, and eight galleys. Of the 30,656 personnel, 18,973 were soldiers.

Nevertheless, compared with the Santa Cruz plan, the 1588 operation suffered greatly from its rigidity, and this was almost certainly the cause of its spectacular failure. The Armada had to get to the Netherlands, already blockaded by the English and Dutch, embark the Spanish army and transport them to England in the teeth of opposition from the aroused and alerted British Navy. In these circumstances no strategic surprise was open to the commanding officer of the Armada. The Santa Cruz plan did not suffer from this disadvantage. It had the essential element of surprise. Its commander could chose his own place and time to land the invading army on the English coast.

Philip's rejection of the Santa Cruz plan seemed at the time the right thing. It was far too ambitious, would cost too much, and the fleet by its very size would be unwieldy, if not unmanageable. A fleet of five hundred and fifty ships would be difficult enough to control with modern systems of propulsion and communication. With the more primitive ships of the sixteenth century this problem would be enormously increased.

It was evident right from the start that the Spaniards miscalculated the weather conditions they were likely to encounter in the Atlantic approaches, and in the English Channel. Sixteenth-century ships, with their great square sails, could not be sailed much into the wind, and were in fact built to sail taking wind and weather on their high sterns.

It has been argued that both schemes were wildly impracticable. Either would have been a mistake. The Armada enterprise was certainly studded with blunders, and was itself a great misconception. To make matters worse, the command of this gigantic task-

force was entrusted to a man with no experience of large-scale naval operations. The Duke of Medina-Sidonia was the King's choice and Philip, inexplicably, stood by him not only after the rout of his "Invincible Armada" but after further defeats at Cadiz (1596), and Gibraltar (1606).

The building of the Armada and the great preparations being made in the Spanish and Portuguese ports quickly came to the ears of Sir Francis Walsingham, who was the head of Queen Elizabeth's secret service. Walsingham had an agent at Malaga named Ousley, who sent secret reports on the building of the Armada concealed in waterproof containers which were inserted in the bung-holes of wine-casks which were being exported to England. Ousley was able to give Walsingham complete details of the ships that were being built, the size of their guns and their military complement, and even the date of the sailing of the fleet.

Thus prepared by the father of the British secret service, England was not content to await the onslaught. The valiant and eloquent Elizabeth, having buckled on the armour of her spirit and assumed the mantle of Gloriana, was determined to meet the danger with a fearless front. She despatched Sir Francis Drake with a fleet of thirty ships to examine the Spanish harbours, and on 18 April 1587 he entered Cadiz roads, saw eighty Spanish ships, sank the lot, proceeded to Cape St Vincent where he demolished a further hundred ships, ravaged the coast and destroyed several forts.

This "singeing the King of Spain's beard" as Drake called it, was fine Elizabethan dare-devilry, but it caused some alarm among Elizabeth's advisers, particularly Burleigh who regarded Drake's exploit in Spain as calculated to provoke war, which of course it did. Philip was in no mood to accept Elizabeth's apologies for Drake's piratical behaviour. His honour was at stake.

The Armada sailed for England in April 1588. Santa Cruz, as one of the originators of the Armada idea, was obviously the man to command it, but he died in February, worn out by a lifetime of service to his king. He died a sad man, for he knew that the Enterprise of England, which the plan for the invasion was called, had proved beyond the powers of the shipyards and administrative capabilities of Spain. Santa Cruz knew that the Armada should never be allowed to sail, and was bold enough to counsel his royal master to this effect. But Philip was not to be deterred. He was

attempting to do something which had never been done in all of naval history.

Disaster dogged the Armada all the way. 1558 was a year of storms. The Armada ran into a fierce gale off Cape Finisterre, was scattered and had to run for shelter. Medina Sidonia, sheltering in Corunna, wrote to Philip reporting considerable damage and sickness among the crews and that many of the ships were badly strained owing to the unusually severe weather. He advised Philip to postpone the attempt for a year. But Philip replied brusquely that the Armada was to proceed against England as soon as possible, even if reduced in strength. Medina Sidonia bowed to his master's wishes, though by no means confident of the outcome.

The Armada was sighted on 19 July 1588 at the mouth of the Channel to the south of the Scilly Isles by fast scouting ships of the English navy. They immediately conveyed the news to Plymouth where, according to legend, Drake and Howard were playing bowls and Drake made the famous reply that there was time to finish the game and beat the Spaniards as well. This was no understatement, nor did it signify contempt for the enemy. The English fleet was held in port by contrary winds, and the Armada was still a day's sail away. It appeared off Plymouth the next day and the English fleet were just able to get to sea and avoid being blockaded in Plymouth.

The Armada was sailing in splendid and massive formation, and was an awe-inspiring sight. Never had such an imposing fleet been assembled. It was a unique moment in history – the first of the great battle-fleets.

The English, with their smaller and more fragile ships, did not dare to offer full battle to the Armada. Instead they snapped around its wings like terriers in a series of running fights up the Channel.

In these battles the English had the advantage of superior seamanship in this kind of fighting. They had the great advantage of being in home waters and their guns were more effective at long range. But the Spanish had the advantage of tonnage, and their ships withstood cannon fire better than the faster, lighter English ships. The Armada also had the advantage of manpower, their galleons being crowded with well-armed soldiers who waited in vain for the English to fight bulwark to bulwark in accordance with the ancient and traditional rules of naval warfare. But the

wily English would not come near the formidable armoury of the mighty Armada.

On 27 July the Armada, somewhat demoralized by their treatment at the hands of the English, and short of ammunition, though more or less intact, anchored in Calais roads, and Medina Sidonia sent an urgent message to the Duke of Parma urging him to embark the Spanish army at once. But as Parma was blockaded this was impossible.

The English chose this moment to send fireships among the anchored Spanish fleet, a dreaded form of attack; the English, fighting for their lives, used every device of war and the fireships wreaked havoc in the Spanish lines. The Armada put to sea in panic and confusion.

On 29 July, with Medina Sidonia beating up the coast of Gravelines in difficult weather and debating the wisdom of continuing the operation, Drake attacked. The English did great damage by keeping to windward and firing at long range with alternate broadsides. The Spanish fought back desperately, but their gunnery and seamanship were no match for the English, and moreover they were perilously short of ammunition by now.

A heavy defeat was saved by a rising gale and the fact that the English too were running out of ammunition. The Armada fled before a sou'-wester up the North Sea, which increased to a full gale during the night. Their only way of escape was around northern Scotland, where they encountered strong westerlies. Many ships were lost on the long straggling journey home.

Many were wrecked on the Irish coast. Some crews were robbed and murdered as they staggered ashore, though many others were returned to Spain by the Irish. Those ships which survived the terrible voyage home suffered greatly from sickness and the lack of fresh water. Of the one hundred and thirty vessels which originally sailed only fifty-four returned to Spain.

The defeat of the Armada was one of the important battles of history, because it ensured the triumph of Protestantism in both England and Holland.

Philip took his defeat unmoved. If he learned anything from his great mistake in sending the Armada to bring out Parma's army in the face of the blockade we shall never know. Nothing is told in the records of history.



The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes

Louis XIV represented royalty at the zenith of its power and majesty. With the decline of the Papal Church, the peoples of Europe turned to their kings to lead them, and the monarchs rose to the occasion which history offered, each according to his or her own lights, and within his or her limitations. Such monarchs were Henry VIII, Charles V, Elizabeth I, Philip II, Gustavus Adolphus and Peter the Great.

If Louis XIV was the greatest of the monarchs of the age of despotism, benevolent or otherwise, he was certainly not the wisest and the policies he pursued during his reign brought great suffering to his country. He laid the foundations for the conditions in France which led to the Revolution. Perhaps his greatest single mistake was when he revoked the Edict of Nantes, a measure originally promulgated by his grandfather, Henry IV in 1598 which granted certain important religious freedoms to the Protestants, or the Huguenots as they were called in France.

The Edict of Nantes followed the Wars of Religion in France

which lasted from 1562 to 1598, during which time men found it impossible to worship God in their own particular way without fighting each other. Catherine de' Medici tried to damp down these impassioned religious battles which followed the Reformation with a curiously detached viewpoint which seemed greatly in advance of the thinking of her time. But no one in Europe was ready to listen to the voice of sanity and reason just then.

The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew was mainly caused by Catherine de' Medici's unscrupulous political scheming. It was her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre, later Henry IV, who put an end to the religious fratricide. Henry IV, any more than Catherine, did not take religion seriously. He was a Protestant, and became a Catholic when his succession to the throne of France depended on it, remarking that Paris was worth a Mass.

Under his Edict of Nantes, Protestants throughout France were granted liberty of conscience and certain rights of public worship. They were also granted full civil rights, the right to trade freely, inherit property, and enter universities, colleges and schools, and all official positions were open to them. *Le Chambre de l'Édit* was established in Paris to deal with disputes arising out of the Edict.

The Edict was little more than an armed truce. Nine-tenths of the French people were Catholics. Compromise and toleration were not words which commended themselves to the minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The wars of religion in Europe had ended finally with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, each side, after great expenditure of blood, having eventually realized the futility of conversion by fire, sword, thumbscrew and jackboot. All the same, the Catholics were no more tolerant of the Protestants than the Protestants were of the Catholics.

There were about a million and three-quarter Huguenots in France during the reign of Louis XIV, and they worshipped in six hundred and thirty "temples"; their religious needs were tended by seven hundred and fifty ministers or pastors. They were concentrated mainly in Guyenne, Poitou, the Dauphine, Saintonge, Béarne and Languedoc. Although they were among the most useful members of society – bankers, traders, doctors and skilled artizans of every kind – they were extremely unpopular with all sections of the French.

Persecution, thinly disguised as conversion, had been going on

for many years before Louis XIV finally revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In 1681 was started the infamous Dragonnade, which was forcible conversion by soldiery. Rough and sadistic soldiers were quartered on Huguenot houses and were encouraged to commit acts of terror and outrage. The dragoons entered into the spirit of the thing with enthusiasm, looting the houses and raping the women with impunity. During 1681 these "soldier missionaries" were said to have terrorized thirty-eight thousand Huguenots into embracing the Catholic faith. It was said that from torture to taking communion rarely took more than twenty-four hours. Obstinate Protestants were strung up by their feet and beaten, their wives whipped, inflated with bellows and then thrown into the street in their shifts.

A delegation of outraged Huguenots led by a nobleman whose chateau had been occupied by these unspeakable dragoons, waited upon the always available, though by no means democratic, Louis XIV, who was shocked to hear of these cruelties and atrocities. They told him of Protestants tortured, hounded by savage dogs and made to abjure at the point of the bayonet. Louis was further disturbed when the missionary work of his licentious soldiery became a general scandal throughout Europe.

It has often been said that Madame de Maintenon, who had been converted from Protestantism, – though not in the manner described above – and whom Louis secretly married in 1683, urged him to champion Catholic imperialism, as Charles V and Philip II had done before him. The role of the St. George of Roman Catholicism had been vacant since the decay of Spain, and Louis XIV, who had an exaggerated sense of his own importance, pictured himself in the role. Dazzled by his own grandiloquence, he was unable to see that he was a century too late upon the scene as the destroyer of heresy in Europe.

He had none of the excuses of the Habsburgs who had championed Rome so tenaciously in the sixteenth century. He did not believe that Protestantism was inimical to order and authority, as Charles V had believed. Nor was he imbued with that Catholic fanaticism which spurred Philip II in his battle against heresy.

Louis did it, as he did everything else, for self-aggrandisement. He did not have the excuse of intense religious ardour; he did not even have strong religious convictions. Louis XIV's action was

politically inspired. He wanted to become master of Europe. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes was part of his grand design.

He believed that he read the signs aright and that Protestantism was in steep decline. In 1685 James II became the first overtly Roman Catholic king to reign over England for more than a century. To Louis this was a momentous event, the reversal in fact of the English Reformation, and it is a measure of his lack of political wisdom that he assumed England now to be a Catholic country about to be received back into the Papal fold. If this *had* been the situation, it would certainly have been a grave blow to Protestantism, and Louis might have had some reason for believing that heresy was on the decline and the final failure of the Reformation in sight. The fact was, the feeling in England was intensely anti-Catholic.

To deal a further blow to Protestantism was part of Louis's inordinate ambition, or grand political design as his admirers put it. He had already fought a partially successful war in Holland and Franche-Comté during which he imagined that he was teaching the heretics a lesson, in the manner of the Habsburg monarchs of the previous century. In the Treaties of Nijmegen of 1678 and 1679 he dictated magnanimous peace terms in the grand manner.

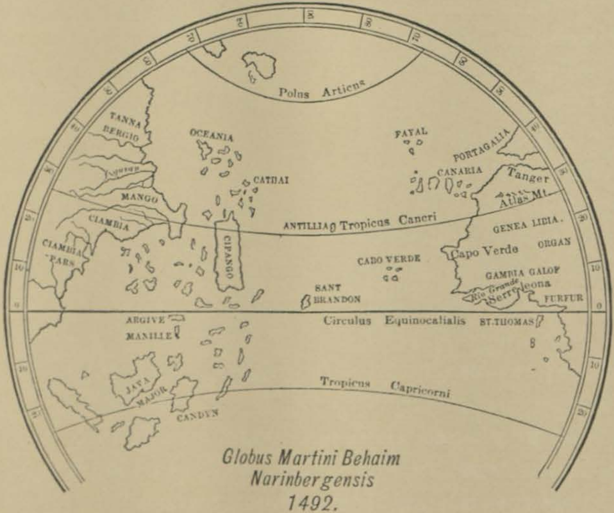
Intoxicated by this victory, he determined to take the war against heresy a step further, in accordance with his grand design. He decided that France, as the new Catholic champion, must be united under the Roman Church. He regarded the Huguenots, a powerful and independent minority, as a kind of fifth column operating against his grand design at home. Deprived of their former military and political power, the Huguenots had turned to manufacture, trade and banking. "As rich as a Huguenot" had become a proverb in France.

Louis signed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 amid general rejoicing in France. The Catholic Church greeted the event with rapture.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," cried the old Chancellor Le Tellier in unspeakable, if faintly blasphemous, ecstacy.

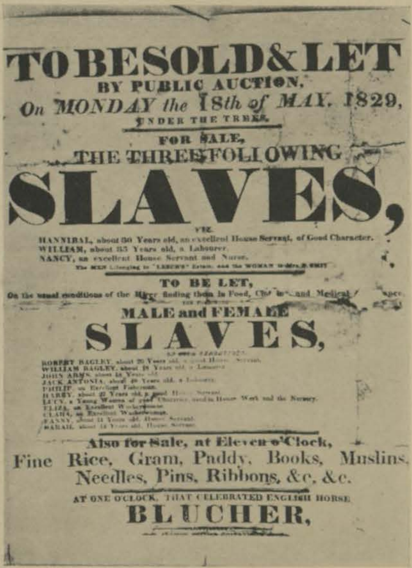
"Let us publish this miracle of our times. Let us dote upon the piety of Louis. Let our acclamations soar to heaven!" rhapsodied Bishop Boussuet. Even after the miracle turned out to be a disaster





Top: a Flemish drawing of Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades fought to liberate the Holy Places from the Turks. Fortunately Jerusalem was "liberated" only once, in 1099, when the Soldiers of the Cross slaughtered every man, woman and child in the city.

Above: Martin Behaim's globe. When Columbus sailed westwards in 1492 this was the extent of the known world. He died believing the islands he had discovered were off the mainland of China, and never dreamed the great continent of America existed.







Above: Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State to Elizabeth I, and head of Britain's Secret Service. His agents in Spain discovered the military and naval details of Philip II's Armada before it sailed against England in 1588, and was destroyed by a combination of weather and superior British naval tactics.

Mankind will almost certainly discover, if it has not already done so, that the Atlantic slave trade was the greatest mistake of history. Slavery had in fact existed throughout the centuries, and it did not greatly shock the conscience of mankind for people were not enslaved because of the colour of their skin, and it was sometimes possible to buy one's freedom. The Atlantic slave trade changed all that. All slaves transported across the Atlantic were negroes destined to be sold to white masters. They and their descendants remained slaves simply because of the colour of their skins—the core of the racial problem of today. Left, above: in the West Indies and the American South slaves were bought and sold like cattle. Left: Sir John Hawkins, the first Englishman to go into the slave trade. The name of his slave ship was the *Jesus*.

in disguise, only a few people in France raised their voices against the folly of their king.

Under the provisions of the Revocation, the Protestant schools were closed and their places of worship abolished. The children of Protestant parents were to be baptized Catholics. Mixed marriages were forbidden and the children of the existing ones declared illegitimate. Protestant clergy were to be exiled, and other Protestants who tried to escape the country were to be sent to the galleys. All Protestant nobles were stripped of their titles.

Draconian measures were ordered to be taken against stubborn Protestants, "who should have no rest or quiet so long as they live in a religion which displeases His Majesty". Whether the religion displeased God was presumably not the point. Under these measures Protestants were hounded to the altar of Rome, bayoneted into the fold of the true Church. In Languedoc alone sixty thousand terrified Huguenots became Catholic after three days of this brutal missionary work.

Much confusion was caused in these forcible conversions by obstinate Huguenots defiling the sacrament and spitting upon the Host after being dragged by the hair to the Catholic altar. The problem was, who was responsible for such blasphemy – the unwilling communicant or those who forced him to the altar. The problem was usually solved by burning the offending Huguenot alive. Some Protestant clergy who bravely returned from exile abroad in order to succour their persecuted flock, met their deaths on the scaffold and the rack.

Those who obstinately clung to their religion were handed over to the soldiers who were permitted to torture and ill-treat them, but not to kill them, though many died later from the brutal handling they suffered.

"The contrast was indeed strange," wrote Voltaire, "between these stern and pitiless orders and the luxurious court from which they emanated, the refinement of its manners, the elegance and charm of its society."

Every possible irritation was applied to the Huguenots. They had already in 1683 been forbidden to employ Catholic servants for fear they should corrupt them and convert them to their religion. They were now ordered to dismiss their Huguenot servants so that they might be arrested as vagabonds.

Many Catholics were shocked by these events in France, and even the Pope was embarrassed when they were denounced by such a celebrated convert to Catholicism as Queen Christina of Sweden. The Pope's private opinion was that the Revocation was a pointless act of folly. Many people believed that it hastened the fall of James II from the throne of England. It was certainly a powerful weapon for his Protestant enemies; James was gravely embarrassed by the actions of the Court of Versailles, and publicly declared that he disapproved of the way the Huguenots were being treated in France. James's embarrassment was thought to be more political than moral.

The most important effect of the Revocation was the great exodus of Huguenots from France. The stream of refugees across the Channel and into the Low Countries and Germany carried with them the most telling propaganda against Louis and Catholicism. The effect of the religious persecution was to unite Protestant Europe against Louis. The Sun-King's religious policies created alarm abroad on political as well as religious grounds.

But the worst effect on France was economic. With their most useful and industrious citizens fleeing the country in their tens of thousands, taking their skills and their capital with them, the effect on the economy was a very serious one. This mass emigration, while it weakened France, enriched her enemies.

The Huguenots were forbidden to leave the country on pain of being sent to the galleys, and many of those attempting to escape France were subjected to this savage penalty, from which there was no reprieve. They were chained to the oars for the rest of their natural life.

All the same, large numbers of Huguenots escaped from France, taking their money and possessions with them. It was only necessary to bribe a few guards, and crowds of fugitives passed unmolested. This widespread corruption of the frontier guards went on for years, for according to Voltaire fifty thousand families left France in the three years following the Revocation. It also points to the fact that the savage persecution of the Protestants did not meet with the approval of the ordinary people of France. Jean Marteilhe, a Huguenot who tried unsuccessfully to escape but was caught and sent to the galleys, wrote later describing the vigorous and persistent efforts which were made by many

French people of all walks of life to save the Huguenots from the fate Louis decreed for them.* The court that sentenced Marteilhe to the galleys did so almost shamefacedly, explaining apologetically that they had no option as they were forced to carry out the orders of the king.

The estimates of the number of Huguenots who left France at this time vary from between a quarter to half a million. Important industries were irreparably damaged by the voluntary exodus of whole communities. The art of glass-cutting was entirely lost to France as a consequence of losing all their glass-cutters who were almost entirely Huguenots.

Rheims, Tours, Nimes and Rouen lost more than half their workers. Out of Lyons' twelve thousand silk workers only three thousand were left. Industries badly hit, apart from glass-cutting, were papermaking, jewellery, clockmaking, clothing, hat making and ship building. Bankers and merchants emigrated taking their capital and their international business with them.

These valued citizens were welcomed with open arms by the Protestant countries which vied with each other in extending hospitality and granting special privileges to people who were nothing less than living wealth, and whose presence enriched every country they settled in.

The Huguenots settled in Holland and the Dutch colonies. Thirteen thousand went to the Cape of Good Hope. Others went to America to bring a new infusion of both wealth and Calvinism into the New World where Louis XIV became known as the Antichrist. The watchmakers and clockmakers of Geneva and Lausanne were originally Huguenots. Multitudes settled in the north of Germany, then depopulated by the Thirty Years War and purely a pastoral region with no industries. The Huguenots transformed it into an industrial area which manufactured cloth, lace, hats and stockings, all of which had previously to be imported. Ten thousand Huguenots settled in London, populating a whole quarter of the city with silk operatives and glass workers. There were also communities in Norwich, York and Exeter.

The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes resulted in the impoverishment of France and the enrichment of her enemies. Holland

**Memoirs of a Protestant Condemned to the Galleys of France for his Religion*, published in London, 1758.

secured excellent Huguenot soldiers, who fought with exceptional valour and fury against the king who had so persecuted them. A whole regiment of these splendid soldiers fought under the Prince of Orange against France.

The Huguenots gave France a bad name for intolerance and inhumanity throughout Europe, a reputation which was not wholly deserved, but which did France and Louis great damage.

Another consequence of the Revocation was an increase in atheism and libertinism, which are popularly supposed to go hand-in-hand. The behaviour of the Catholic Church in France and its brutal oppression of the Huguenots outraged the consciences of many Frenchmen who were good Catholics, and this was doubtless the reason why so many of the persecuted escaped from France with their belongings and their treasure, against the strict order of the king.

Irreligion became fashionable in France. People who were devout Catholics in public belonged to free-thinking and atheistic circles in private. Paganism was widespread in Paris where, it was said, almost every young man aspired to be an atheist. Many of these atheistic circles were linked with similar movements in London where disillusion with the un-Christian intolerance of both Protestants and Catholics was widespread among the aristocracy and intelligentsia.

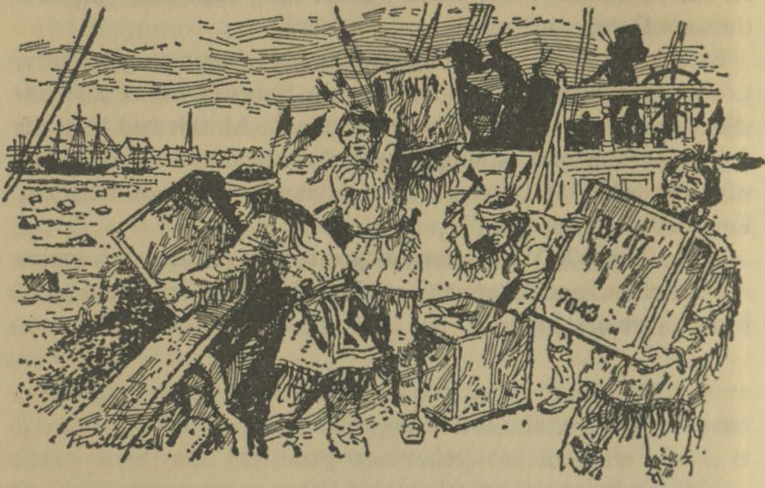
Irreligion was, rightly or wrongly, linked with the increase in libertinism which characterized the age, though no one seriously suggested that the notorious homosexuality of Louis XIV's brother, the Duke of Orleans, the poisoning activities of the licentious Marie de Brinvilliers, or the increasing tendency of society women to engage handsome valets instead of chambermaids, had anything to do with atheism.

The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes has been condemned as Louis XIV's greatest blunder. Louis became the traditional enemy of Protestantism, so much so that some Prussians looked upon him as the real enemy they were fighting in the 1870 war, even though he had by then been dead for a century and a half. Some historians believe that the combined effect of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes was to retard the development of political democracy in France by a century.

Fortunately it was the last dismal act in the fierce battle of the intolerant religionists which began with the Reformation. When Louis once more launched a war of aggression in Europe, he found all the Protestant states allied against him, regarding him as a threat to European liberties.

By the end of his long reign, which had begun so gloriously, Louis found France facing bankruptcy. Industry was at a standstill, farmers starving, foreign trade ruined. All this had been his doing. At Versailles a hungry mob shouted curses at the king's windows, while at Dijon a crowd shouted: "Let us do what the English did to their king!"

When Louis XIV died, crowds greeted his cortège with curses and laughter, and lampoons celebrated the end of the age of France's greatest king.



The Loss of the American Colonies

The monumental mistakes which led to England losing the most valuable part of her empire, the thirteen American colonies, are usually laid at the door of George III and Lord North. George III was in many ways a worthy king, and North was an inconsequential, if conscientious, politician: both were mediocre men who were blind to the potentialities of the country which was developing in North America. As Edmund Burke, the eminent political philosopher of the time, put it, "A great empire and little minds go ill together."

It was not a fortunate moment for England when George III came to the throne in 1760. He was a handsome, robust youth of twenty-two, who immediately grasped the reigns of royal power, which had fallen from the worthless and dissolute hands of his two Hanoverian predecessors.

For the next twenty years England's destinies were at the mercy of this inexperienced king, who lacked judgement and did not have the wisdom to take the advice of those who had it, though there was no lack of such men in his kingdom. But for George III's

passion "to be a king", England would have been ruled by William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham, the greatest statesman of his day, and the story of England and America would have had a very different ending.

The Hanoverians originally had scant claim to the English throne. George I was hastily put upon it in 1714 in order to keep out the true heirs, the Roman Catholic Stuarts, whom a French archbishop described as "simpletons prepared to lose their kingdom for a Mass". German George spoke no word of English, and was more interested in his Hanoverian realms. His ministers were quick to take advantage of the situation by setting up the cabinet system and ruling the country in his place.

This worked very well indeed and it enabled England to lay the foundations for a democratic constitutional monarchy which has ever since been the envy of all other monarchies.

During the reigns of the first two Georges England was governed under the political oligarchy of the great Whig families. It was not democracy, but the Parliamentary system at least tended to bring the most powerful and efficient men to the top. Entry into Parliament was more by privilege and wealth than by election, and the Whig party remained dominant during the first half of the eighteenth century because the Tories had associated themselves too closely with the Jacobite rebellions fostered by the Catholic Stuarts in their attempts to regain the throne.

When George III succeeded to the throne at the death of his grandfather George II, England had been transformed into a powerful, imperial nation under a Parliamentary rule which had reduced the power of the monarch to its lowest degree since before the advent of the Normans.

It could not be said that the country had suffered thereby. England, despite the fact that she was fighting the Seven Years War, was peaceful and prosperous. Art and letters flourished. There was unprecedented freedom of expression and religious toleration. It was the age of science and philosophy. The economic life had been enriched by the industrial skills and trade secrets of foreign Protestant refugees, such as the Huguenots, fleeing from oppression, who had settled in England in their thousands.

Led by such legendary statesmen as Robert Walpole and Chatham, England succeeded in driving the French from Canada

and India, and securing the North American continent, with the exception of Mexico, for the English race. Britain ruled the seas with a mighty, unchallengeable fleet. Her great empire "bestrode the world like a colossus". Her colonies included much of the West Indies and she held numerous trading posts – the nucleus of more possessions – in Africa.

Britain's ascendancy was mainly the work of Chatham. When the Seven Years War broke out between France and Austria on the one hand and Prussia (under Frederick the Great) on the other, he unhesitatingly brought England in on the side of Prussia with money and soldiers; he also took the opportunity of driving the French out of Canada and India and securing the position of the thirteen American colonies.

Chatham's aim was to end France's military domination of Europe. If he had succeeded, it is likely that Europe would have been spared the Napoleonic nightmare. But all his policies were frustrated and brought to naught by George III.

The king's head had been swollen by reading Bolingbroke's book *The Idea of a Patriotic King*. His ambitions were further inflamed by the fact that he lived in the age of the Enlightened Despots, or the Benevolent Despots, as dominant monarchs of the day were called. Such rulers as Louis XIV, Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II of Austria, and Frederick the Great, succeeded in establishing absolute royal power and ruling personally through a centralized bureaucracy. This type of monarchy, advocated by such philosophers as Voltaire, was tempered by the new and enlightened ideas of the times and was, broadly speaking, not unsuccessful judged by the standards of the day.

George III when he came to the throne in 1760 was determined to be this sort of king. He renounced his German nationality which had alienated the two previous Georges from their English subjects, who had as a consequence quietly robbed them of their royal power.

"Born and educated in this country, I glory in the name of Briton," declared George III in his first speech to Parliament. But this fell flat with his subjects. He should have called himself an Englishman, although the name "Briton" is perhaps not inappropriate for a man without a drop of English. Welsh or Scottish blood in his veins.

The first thing the impetuous young king did when he mounted the throne was to dismiss Chatham, England's ablest statesman, as well as the most popular man of his day, and replace him with Lord Bute, who had been George's tutor, but who soon had to resign owing to his unpopularity.

By 1763 George III had successfully recovered the lost powers of the English monarchy, though he had not succeeded in gaining the affection of his people, who did not forgive him dismissing their hero in favour of the highly unpopular Bute.

"Farmer George" lived a dull, unromantic life, and his homely, frugal domesticity had little appeal. Only later in his reign, during his mental breakdown and the popular indignation aroused by the behaviour of his eldest son, the Prince Regent, did he receive any affection from his people.

By 1770 George III emerged triumphant over Parliament and particularly the Whigs, and over Chatham, whom he hated. He had learned how to manipulate politics by bribery and corruption and to put into power second-rate politicians willing to serve him without a policy of their own. He had spent so much money supporting "friendly" members in the House of Commons that his palace servants complained that they were not getting enough to eat. At one election he spent over a hundred thousand pounds to get his own henchmen elected to Parliament.

He had not of course corrupted English political life, which had always been subject to bribery and corruption. What he had done was to oust from power every honest and capable politician in the kingdom. To hold office under George III a man had to be a time-server. George had a calculated aversion to really capable men.

Lord North who became Prime Minister in 1770 was a friend of the king's, an easy-going, good-natured man. North and his Cabinet took their orders directly from the king. For the next twelve years every detail of administration was dictated by George III in daily letters to North and the other ministers, and during this time George III directed the policy which precipitated the disintegration of the British Empire in America and resulted in the emergence of the United States.

The British American colonials of the mid-eighteenth century were in many ways the most fortunate and favoured people on

earth. They enjoyed an invigorating and rugged prosperity, and, with the exception of course of the negroes, were more free than any other people in the world. They enjoyed a democratic form of self-government and were totally free of the feudalism which lingered in most parts of Europe in one form or another. The social equality which existed surprised, even shocked, European visitors. There was almost complete freedom of speech. The trades and professions were open to all men of talent and were not controlled by exclusive guilds and corporations. There was no press-ganging or exorbitant tithes. Taxes were light. Land tenure was free.

This remarkably liberal and prosperous community which stretched along the Atlantic coast from Maine to South Carolina, was the creation of the English. They had settled New Hampshire in 1623, Massachusetts Bay in 1629, Maine in 1632, Connecticut in 1635, New Jersey in 1665. Of the southern colonies the Carolinas were settled in 1663, and Virginia, the oldest colony and the first permanent English settlement in America, in 1607.

This new English world, full of vigour, freedom and initiative, was the nucleus not only of the British Empire, but of the United States, the very existence of which is owed to the Englishman's love of freedom and hatred of tyranny.

It was from tyranny, mainly religious, which these Englishmen who had settled in the thirteen colonies had fled. Their revolt, which led to their Declaration of Independence, was against their fellow Englishmen who were too blind and small-minded to see what had happened on the other side of the Atlantic. The War of Independence was really a civil war – Englishmen against Englishmen, with all that was best in England fighting against the old country, which was bemused by the elegant torpor of the Age of Reason and led by an ignorant, obstinate king who ended his days both blind and mad.

In 1763 the thirteen colonies had a population of about a million and a half,* nearly one-third of which were negro slaves, mainly in the plantations of the Carolinas and Virginia. Slave labour was a necessity to the social and economic system which had grown up in the south.

*This is the most reliable estimate, though at the time the population was said to be higher.

South Carolina was very prosperous, having a population of a hundred thousand in 1763. It grew large quantities of rice, negro slaves doing all the work. Its capital, Charleston, was a gay and flourishing town whose wealthy citizens sent their sons to be educated in England. North Carolina was the least prosperous, its small farmers, mainly Scots, Irish, Swiss and Germans, earning a modest living from their crops.

Virginia, the oldest colony, was the most aristocratic. If you were descended from the original settlers, you were a First Family, and at the top of the social tree. The early Virginians had the reputation of being haughty and proud of their English blood. The prosperity of this first dominion depended largely upon tobacco and cheap slave labour on the plantations.

The largest and most prosperous town in English America was Philadelphia, the capital of Pennsylvania, with a population of nearly nineteen thousand. Philadelphia was controlled largely by English Quakers, who were prosperous lawyers and merchants. Many Germans, Irish and Scots had settled there and were farming in the frontier and back country.

New York City had originally been settled by the Dutch and called New Amsterdam. In 1615 it had consisted of a fort, a storehouse and a few mud huts at the south end of Manhattan Island. By 1664 the English had taken it over and had re-named it New York. A hundred years later it was a compactly built little cosmopolitan city, the third largest in the English colonies, still bearing the marks of its Dutch origin.

Dutch, Swedish as well as English merchants prospered on the fur trade from the Hudson valley, and lived in splendid mansions overlooking the river, which were staffed by negro slaves. Close by were fetid slums where dock labourers and free negroes lived. In New York state, politics were controlled by a few aristocratic English and Dutch families such as the De Lanceys and the Stuyvesants, and only those with property qualification could vote, though in democratic New England every adult male had the franchise. New England prospered on maritime trade, particularly with the West Indies, and Nantucket was already the home of deep-sea whaling. Smuggling was also a well-organized business.

These American colonists were by no means people of like temperament and outlook, and there was a great difference between

the democratic New Englanders who were Puritans, and whose social life revolved around their places of worship, and the patrician planters of Southern Carolina who enjoyed all the amenities of a wealthy and leisured life at the expense of a servile black population who tilled their plantations.

The British colonial system in 1763, the year in which the Seven Years War ended with the Treaty of Paris, was by no means illiberal. The colonists themselves had almost complete home rule, and their taxation was under their own control. The American colonies had in fact acquired considerably more autonomy than Ireland then had. They had a great deal more freedom and self-government than the colonies of Spain or France, or of any other country at that time.

The American colonies fought to preserve the freedom which as Englishmen they considered their birthright.

In 1763 the Americans were in fact content with their position. They had no desire for independence, and were happy to let England manage foreign affairs. The result of the Seven Years War had been greatly to their advantage. It had ended the French dominance in Canada and relieved the British American colonists of the necessity of leaning on the mother country for protection against the French.

It seemed right to England therefore that the colonies should help to pay the expenses of the war which had benefited them in this way. The English Parliament thereupon passed the Stamp Duty of 1765 which levied a stamp tax on all legal documents. This aroused such a furore that it was repealed the following year. There was rioting in several American cities, including Boston and New York; the colonists began to boycott English manufactured goods and suspend payments of their mercantile debts to England.

What the Americans objected to was not so much the tax – they had no objection to paying their share of the war costs – but to the fact that the tax had been imposed by the English Parliament in which they were not represented. Taxation without representation was the precious principle which was the core of the quarrel between England and the colonists.

It was an important constitutional issue. It was natural that the Americans should object to being taxed by a government in which they had no democratic say. It was not a new issue, for the

Americans, while always acknowledging allegiance to the crown, had never conceded the supreme power of Parliament in the matter of taxation which affected the colonies. They had their own assemblies which levied taxes. So far as constitutional law is concerned, each side had an arguable case. But from the point of view of political expediency, it was much better that the taxes levied on the colonies for imperial purposes should be voted by the representatives of their own assemblies rather than Parliament in London. This was conceded by responsible political opinion in England.

"This kingdom has no right to lay a tax on the colonies," Chatham flatly declared in Parliament on 14 January 1766. "The Americans are subjects of this kingdom, equally entitled with yourselves to all the rights of mankind and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen. . . . The Americans are the sons, not the bastards, of England. The distinction between legislation and taxation is essential to liberty."

Unfortunately for Britain, lesser men than Chatham were at the head of affairs during that fateful decade when the American colonies were irreparably alienated.

Public opinion in England however was not on the side of wisdom and tolerance. George III in his headlong rush to disaster, had the country generally on his side, even though Burke and Chatham pointed out the calamitous consequences of his policies.

The fact was that there was great commercial jealousy among British mercantile interests about the growing prosperity and economic expansion in the American colonies. The expulsion of the French from Canada and the acquisition of Florida from Spain had given compactness and strength to these vast colonies which were growing at a great rate in terms of both wealth and population. Their trade with the West Indies and the Spanish American colonies grew year by year. Their ship-building industries made a large contribution to the world's mercantile marine. Not only were their exports rising, but their imports from England alone were an important item in English trade, amounting to three million pounds annually, chiefly of manufactured goods. They were an export market of enormous value.

Instead of English businessmen perceiving what a mighty trading prospect was opening up for them across the Atlantic,

their commercial jealousy was aroused by the large illicit trade which the Americans were carrying on with the Spanish, French and other colonies, and even with Europe. In particular were the voices of the planters of the British West Indies heard in Parliament complaining that the Americans were robbing them of their monopoly in rum, sugar and coffee by wholesale smuggling with the Dutch, French and Spanish islands of the Caribbean. These planters, incidentally, had a say in the London Parliament, unlike the American colonists; they were absentee landlords living in England on the profits of their slave-run West Indian estates.

Such uninformed criticism of the Americans, based upon the selfish commercial considerations of the few, inflamed opinion in England where the colonists were widely believed to be employed in doing little else than smuggling and stealing the legitimate business of honest British traders. The English government listened to these views instead of making themselves aware of the true situation in America, and realizing the strength and maturity of the community which was developing there, its great economic potential and inestimable value as a possession.

England held the view that the trade of the colonies must not be permitted to compete or conflict with the economic interest of the mother country.

To have given the Americans what they wanted would have cost Britain nothing but a little of George III's pride. The Americans had no wish just then to break away from England, for the late war had demonstrated to them the advantages of being under the protection of the British forces.

In 1763 Britain, at the peak of her power and her pride, refused to give an inch to the colonials. Rather she sought to bring them even more under her control. Not only were the troops who fought in the late war kept on American soil, but the garrison was reinforced and the soldiers were quartered on the colonists in a manner which aroused great resentment. Britain also tried to restrict the expansion of the colonists into the Middle West.

But "taxation without representation" was the thing which aroused the Americans most, and was the rallying cry of the rebellion, which was not however to come until the seventies.

In May 1765 the Assembly of Virginia passed a set of resolutions declaring that it had "the only and sole exclusive right and power

to lay taxes upon the inhabitants of this colony" who were "not bound to yield obedience to any law" of Parliament attempting to tax them. This resolution led to the calling of a Congress in New York City attended by representatives of all the colonies, who discovered that their views were identical on the subject and who then passed a similar resolution on behalf of the thirteen colonies. They let it be known in London that they considered that they should have the sole and exclusive right to tax themselves.

This reasonable view did not commend itself to George III, who was in firm control of his government, and issuing them with day-to-day instructions. He was however surprised at the strength and determination of the Americans' defiance.

Between 1765 and 1774 the dispute smouldered, every now and then bursting into flame and then dying down again. The quarrel was mainly about taxes and duties, their imposition being followed by vigorous protests from across the Atlantic and boycotts of British imports. In 1768 there was an ominous incident in Boston when Redcoats protecting the Customs Commissioners there fired on a jeering mob, killing five and seriously wounding six others. This "Boston Massacre" as it was called naturally served to inflame the feelings of the Americans even further.

The dispute was between two societies so utterly unalike, so diverse in traditions, environment, social habits and background, that the two sides completely failed to understand each other's point of view. Despite their common tongue and common blood, they did not speak each other's language. In many important respects, England and her American colonies had gone different ways.

England was an aristocratic society, with elaborate social artifices, and with an unbridgeable chasm between the rich and privileged, and the poor and lower classes. An entirely new and different society was growing in America, where despite the aristocracy of the First Families, a healthy democracy was already in being, and any man with talent could rise to the top. Social life was simple, uncomplicated, and crude by English standards. Political opinion was formed by farmers and frontiersmen, while in England it was firmly in the hands of the squires and landed gentry, and the people had no voice in affairs.

But the greatest barrier to understanding was undoubtedly the

Atlantic Ocean. The voyage across took between six and seven weeks, and in the best conditions was disagreeable. People from the home country made it only at the call of duty; there were no English observers of the American scene. George III never thought to send a commission of investigation into the colonists' complaints, much less to go there himself, as a modern writer on the subject suggested he should have done. For a king to tour his dominions in those days was unheard-of, unless like Charles V he led his armies into battle to defend his faraway frontiers. Anyway, George III, the king who gloried in the name of "Briton" never went outside England.

Tired of the half-hearted criticism of such chief ministers as Townshend, Greville and Rockingham, who seemed aware that their king was well charted on the road to disaster, George III finally made his friend and henchman Lord North Prime Minister.

North, who became the second Earl of Guildford on the death of his father, was a weak but honest man, with no policies of his own, save his desire to oblige his sovereign. He was Prime Minister for twelve of the most fateful years in England's history. During this time the king directed the policies to be pursued, and North was his pliant instrument and obeyed him in every particular.

The folly of George III and the corruption of his lickspittle politicians remains one of the great scandals of English history.

Despite North's attempt to cool the situation down by abolishing all the taxes except that on tea, the Americans refused to be mollified. In December 1773 occurred the famous Boston Tea Party when a party of young colonists disguised as Red Indians dumped three shiploads of tea about to be unloaded from British ships into Boston Harbour.

This provoked George III's government to take a step from which it was all but impossible to retreat. Penal Acts were rushed through Parliament, which closed the port of Boston, cancelled the charter of Massachusetts, and ordered that the political trials of Americans should be held in England. This so-called firmness in the face of the provocation of the Boston Tea Party was the final and fatal mistake which shattered Britain's empire in America.

When the Redcoats entered Boston to enforce the law of the English Parliament, Massachusetts set up a Revolutionary Government outside the city and began to prepare for war.

The other colonies immediately rallied to the aid of Massachusetts. The effect of the Penal or Coercive Acts was to convert many conservative waverers to the side of the radicals who were now openly urging a complete break with the mother country. War was inevitable.

Yet Britain was ill-prepared for war with America, and as the Americans organized themselves for armed resistance, the British commander-in-chief urgently requested reinforcements.

In the meantime representatives of the colonies met as the First Continental Congress at Philadelphia in September 1774. Most of them did not want independence. They wanted what we would call today dominion status. They issued a Declaration of Rights, claiming that Americans were entitled to all English liberties, and citing the instances during the past ten years in which Parliament had violated that principle.

The distance across the Atlantic, while it permitted hot tempers to cool, also meant that the military situation could get out of hand. Benjamin Franklin wisely suggested that England should send out a Royal Commission to the thirteen states to find out exactly what the colonists' grievances were. But this George III flatly and foolishly refused, saying that it would give the impression that he was more afraid of the Americans than they were of him.

Early in 1775 two of England's greatest statesmen, Chatham and Edmund Burke, made determined efforts to save England from the vast act of folly into which their king and his Parliamentary henchmen were taking her.

In the House of Lords, Chatham, "looking like an old Roman Senator, rising with the dignity of age, yet speaking with the fire of youth" (as one who was present wrote), turned his devastating eloquence upon the king's guilty ministers.

"Resistance to your Acts," he declared, "was as necessary as it was just. Your vain declarations of the omnipotence of Parliament, and your imperious doctrines of the necessity of submission, will be found incompetent to convince or to enslave your fellow subjects in America, who feel that tyranny, whether attempted by an individual part of the legislature, or the bodies who compose it, is equally intolerable to British subjects. All attempts to impose servitude on such men, to establish despotism over such a mighty continental nation, must be in vain, must be fatal. We shall be

forced ultimately to retract. Let us then retract while we can – not when we must. Avoid then this humiliation, this disgraceful necessity."

Chatham brought in a Bill for the pacification of the colonies, which Benjamin Franklin helped him to draft. This Bill, while asserting the supreme power of the crown over the colonies, decreed that no armed force could be lawfully employed against the rights and liberties of the inhabitants, and no tax levied without the consent of the provincial assemblies. It repealed all the Acts of Parliament relating to America passed since 1764. These concessions, and others, were made conditional on the recognition by the colonies of the supreme authority of Parliament.

Had this Bill been passed, it would doubtless have gone far to heal the rupture between the mother country and her colonies. But those in control of the nation's affairs were in no mood to listen to the voice of reason, and Chatham's Bill was rejected.

In March 1775 another attempt was made to arrest the drift to disaster, this time by Edmund Burke in the House of Commons when he introduced thirteen resolutions which would abolish the obnoxious Acts of Parliament, and admit the principle of colonial assemblies exercising the power of controlling their own taxation.

In one of his finest speeches, the far-sighted Burke drew a striking picture of the rapid growth of the thirteen colonies and the great future which would inevitably come to America. He reminded the House that the people who lived in these colonies had quitted Great Britain because they would not submit to tyranny and arbitrary measures. In America, he declared, they had cultivated this extreme independence of character both in their religion and their daily life. It was useless to fight against such a spirit.

But Burke's resolutions were negatived by a large majority, and on 26 May 1775 George III prorogued Parliament, well satisfied with the course events were taking and believing that the impudent colonists would quickly be brought to heel. He did not know that the War of the American Independence had begun and that his colonies were already lost to him.

The utter failure of the British Army in America is a matter of history, as is the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776 in which the Americans justified their separation from Britain. The war lingered on for several years until the final surrender of

Cornwallis at Yorktown on 19 October 1781, when England, with now almost all of Europe against her, was forced to give up the struggle.

Long before that, the catastrophe which George III's personal misrule had brought upon the British Empire had occasioned widespread outcry in England.

"Can Parliament be so dead to its dignity and its duty," thundered Chatham in the Lords, "as to give unlimited credit and support to a Government in measures which are reducing this flourishing empire to ruin and contempt? But yesterday – and England might have stood against the world. Now none so poor to do her reverence! I use the words of a poet.* But though it be poetry, it is no fiction. It is a shameful truth that not only the power and strength of this country are wasting away and expiring, but her well-earned glories, her true honour and substantial dignity are sacrificed. . . . If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I would never lay down my arms – never! never! never!"

On 7 April 1788 the great Earl of Chatham made his dying speech in the House of Lords in protest against the way the Government (i.e. George III) had thrown away the American possessions. In the middle of his speech, he staggered and fell, and to the horror of the House suffered a fatal stroke before their eyes. Taken to his home at Hayes, he lingered insensible until 11 May when he died.

George III bitterly regarded Chatham as a traitor, but the final humiliation of Yorktown made him at last realize his own monstrous mistake, and that his attempt to govern England on the lines of a "Patriot King" and Benevolent Despot had utterly and disastrously failed and had lost him the finest and most valuable part of his empire.

Lord North finally resigned in March 1782, and that was the end, for ever, of personal government by an English monarch. George III had the sense not to persist in it. If he had done, England would almost certainly have become a republic. His successors, too, learnt the lesson.

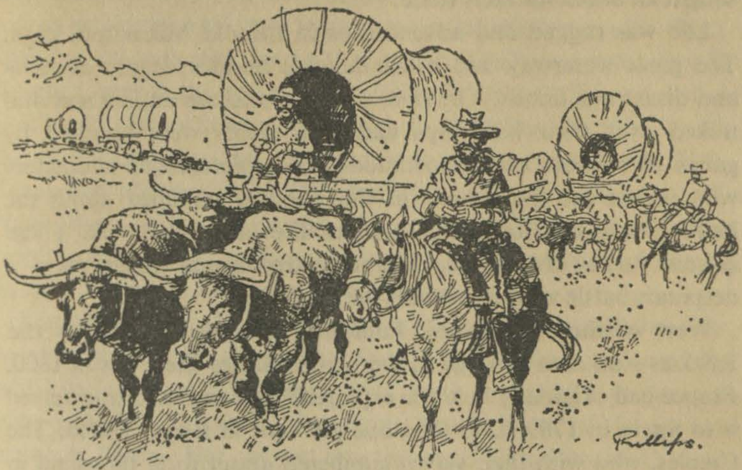
But at what a cost! That of an empire fairer, richer, more promising than any empire in the history of the world. Not an

*Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*.

empire of conquered, subject peoples, but an empire, a commonwealth, of Englishmen who had left their native land to trade and toil and prosper and by their genius, their sense of justice, to expand and exploit a land of immeasurable wealth and promise. There never was an empire like that which promised in America in the eighteenth century. It is impossible to tell what course the history of the American and British peoples would have taken had this empire not been thrown away by the calamitous policy of an English king.

George III was so bitterly conscious of his failure that he seriously contemplated abdication, and on two occasions drew up documents to announce this to Parliament. Was he aware that his conduct had utterly discredited the idea of absolute kingship? The lesson was certainly learned by Britain which has never since allowed its monarchs to control policy.

In 1788 George III had a complete mental breakdown, and his madness persisted through thirty-two long years, with brief periods of intervening sanity until 1820, when, blind, pathetic, alone, with consciousness little more than a waking dream, he died at Windsor almost forgotten.



Louisiana Purchase

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the western boundary of the United States of America lay along the bank of the Mississippi River. Beyond this was a large, vaguely-defined territory called Spanish Louisiana. The south-western American frontier did not reach as far south as the port of New Orleans, but turned eastwards at the thirty-first parallel where the southern boundary of the state of Mississippi at present abuts the state of Louisiana. The old United States frontier ran in a more or less direct line eastwards to the Atlantic seaboard at the southern boundary of Georgia. In those days the United States had no access to the Gulf of Mexico.

The two territories to the south of the thirty-first parallel were called West Florida and East Florida, and they belonged to Spain. Included in this Spanish area was New Orleans. The result of this was that, while the American traders and merchants had free use of the Mississippi, the access to the sea at New Orleans was controlled by Spain.

In those days the Mississippi valley was the central highway of North America. The economic importance of the Mississippi to

the American West was enormous. Before the arrival of the famous steamboats, the traffic was carried on by barges and flatboats, and became of increasing value as the settlers grew in numbers and sought an outlet for their trade.

Life was rugged and adventurous in the old Mississippi days. The great waterway had other dangers besides deadly currents and disastrous floods. The river towns where the settlers met and talked over their hardships and their debts were haunted by gangs of robbers and desperadoes, wild, picturesque characters who lurked on the islands in the river or galloped along the banks ready to attack and plunder the laden flatboats. These bandits turned riverside caves into fortresses and fought many a desperate battle with the settlers they outraged.

West of the Mississippi, Louisiana stretched as far as the Rockies – an area as large as the United States itself was in 1800. France had originally held the explorers' title to it and transferred it to Spain in 1769. Less than one per cent of it was settled. The Creoles, who with their slaves numbered about forty thousand in 1800, were mostly in the lower Mississippi. A small number of garrisons and trading posts were dotted on the river bank as far north as St. Louis, and the Red River was sparsely settled. The main crops were sugar cane and cotton, and the plantations were all worked by slave labour. The colony however remained essentially French, and the transfer to Spanish rule had not been popular. The rest of this vast territory to the north was occupied by Red Indians whose hunting grounds were undisputed.

France had been driven out of Canada by the Seven Years War, and had ever since been trying to replace this colonial loss by a more profitable base in North America. By 1799 the restless and ambitious Napoleon Bonaparte was in power, and he set about the consolidation of French-controlled territory in all parts of the world as part of his plan to make France all-powerful.

On 1 October 1800 he entered into a secret treaty with Spain to get back Louisiana. This vast territory was planned to be the nucleus of a great Franco-American empire.

It had always been Spain's policy to keep the United States out of the West, for Spain had extensive settlements on the other side of the Rockies, particularly in California. Louisiana was of course susceptible to American penetration, being so sparsely settled and

really Indian country. Spain's firm hold on New Orleans acted as a brake to any expeditions to the west across the Mississippi.

There were several interesting reasons why Spain ceded Louisiana to France; apart from the belief that a vigorous French colony would be an effective bar to America's ambitions in the West, Spain's real colonial interests were in California and South America, and at the end of the eighteenth century she was under French political influence, despite their difference of outlook and the affront caused to the Bourbons by the execution of Louis XVI. Spain had always feared British naval power, especially in the New World, and she sought alliance with France in order to restore her colonial and naval prestige at the expense of Great Britain. Spain and France had a common enemy.

Napoleon in his desire to get possession of Louisiana was able to exercise the kind of coercion for which he was famed, and by which he acquired his second wife, Marie Louise of Austria (see page 104). The Queen of Spain was Maria Luisa of the Italian house of Parma. Her consort was the weak King Charles IV, and her lover was an ambitious man named Manuel Godoy, who was made Duke of Alcudia for his dubious services to the Spanish throne. The Queen and Godoy ruled Spain.

The Duchy of Parma had been conquered by the French Revolutionary armies in 1796, and Napoleon was able to bring the requisite pressure on Maria Luisa by promising to make her kinsman, the Duke of Parma, a king and enlarge his Italian realms at the expense of his neighbours. In return Spain would retrocede Louisiana. Godoy was also under Napoleon's influence.

Thus for these inconsiderable favours Spain agreed to give back to France their vast lands of Spanish Louisiana, which stretched from the Mississippi to the Rockies, from New Orleans to the Canadian border, and which now embraced no fewer than thirteen of the present United States. Spain, servile to French wishes, further undertook to support Napoleon's foreign policy. Napoleon, in order to placate Spain's fears of the United States pushing westwards to Spanish-held California, promised not to dispose of Louisiana to a third power – a promise which he broke, much to Spain's chagrin.

As soon as his hands were free in Europe, Napoleon intended to launch a big colonial offensive in America, with naval bases

in the Gulf of Mexico, military posts on the Mississippi and industrious settlers in the vast plains of the central hinterland between the Mississippi and the Rockies, then the hunting grounds of the Pawnee, the Sioux and the Kansa.

But in 1800 it was not convenient to take possession of Louisiana, so Napoleon kept the treaty secret. In the meantime he sent a French expeditionary force to Hispaniola (Haiti) with orders to suppress the negro republic which had been set up there by Toussaint l'Ouverture. After that the force was to take possession of New Orleans and Louisiana. But the Haitians, who had suffered much from their white masters and tasted freedom, put up a tremendous fight, and it was beyond the powers of Napoleon's little army to subdue and re-enslave them.

With Napoleon still formulating policy in France, an event occurred which changed the whole situation.

In 1794 Spain had recognized the Mississippi River as the western boundary of the United States and granted free navigation of the river to American citizens, together with the right to "deposit their merchandise and effects in the port of New Orleans and to export them from thence without paying any other duty than a fair price for the hire of the stores".

Late in 1802 the Spanish governor of Louisiana withdrew the right of deposit to American traders and closed the port of New Orleans to them. This action was taken on the direct orders of the Spanish government at Madrid, and was a reprisal against American smuggling, particularly of gold and silver, through New Orleans, and also against persistent complaints of unfair treatment meted out to Spanish sailors in American ports. At the time, however, it was not made known why Spain had taken this action at New Orleans, and the Spanish governor there would give no reason. Tempers began to rise.

Meanwhile the secret French acquisition of Louisiana had been discovered by the American minister in London and reported to Washington. The transfer of Louisiana from a weak nation like Spain to so powerful and ambitious a state as France was a matter of great concern to the United States. The very thought of militant Bonapartist France athwart the Mississippi at New Orleans and claiming all the western bank of this vast river was something of a nightmare to the America of 1802.

President Jefferson, already disturbed at the military activities of the French in the Caribbean, had written to his minister in Paris in April 1802: "The day that France takes possession of New Orleans, we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation." For an American President to say this a mere twenty years after the War of Independence created a sensation in diplomatic circles, where it was generally assumed that the Americans would prefer the contraction of smallpox to such a union. It certainly sounded like the counsel of despair.

As it was, there was instant clamour for war against Spain over the closing of New Orleans. Only Jefferson remained unperturbed, even though the general agreement was that the act justified war, and the suggestion of occupying New Orleans with American troops was openly canvassed.

Jefferson however was all for settling the matter amicably. Surely agreement was possible between two countries which had so much in common. After all, France had assisted America during the War of Independence, and there had been much American sympathy with the French Revolution. A quarrel between the two great revolutionary nations of the world was unthinkable.

Jefferson instructed Robert R. Livingston, the American minister in Paris, an able, though not particularly popular man, to try and prevent Louisiana being ceded back to France, or if that was impossible, to endeavour to buy East and West Florida and New Orleans, which would secure the free access of United States commerce in and out of the Mississippi.

Jefferson and his supporters pushed a measure through Congress authorizing two million dollars for "expenses in relation to the intercourse between the United States and foreign nations". In March 1803 Jefferson sent James Monroe, who later became United States President, as Envoy Extraordinary to France.

Monroe's instructions were to offer up to $10 millions for New Orleans and the Floridas. This would extend the boundaries of the United States to the Gulf coast and give them control of the whole of the left bank of the Mississippi. If France refused, or was unable to comply owing to her treaty obligations with Spain, then Monroe was to offer up to $7,500,000 for the island of New Orleans. If this was refused, they were to try and negotiate a permanent agreement for the right of maritime transit for Ameri-

can goods through New Orleans. Failing *any* agreement with France, Monroe was then to go to London with the object of getting closer associations and a defence agreement with the British.

Monroe, as Envoy Extraordinary, was instructed to work in association with Robert Livingston in these negotiations.

From the start there was friction and jealousy between the two men. Livingston greatly resented Jefferson sending Monroe as the senior negotiator, believing he could reach agreement before Monroe arrived. Although he did not know the details of Monroe's brief he was well aware of Jefferson's policy, for innumerable despatches had been passing to and fro between Washington and Paris on the Atlantic packets, and Livingston had had a number of discussions with the French government on the subject.

Monroe sailed from New York with his family on 8 March 1803 and arrived at Le Havre exactly a calendar month later, reaching Paris on 12 April.

In the meantime Livingston had been extremely busy trying to close a deal with Napoleon before Monroe could get there. Livingston was not unnaturally anxious to steal all the credit if he possibly could.

He negotiated with Talleyrand. The preliminary discussions were centred around the Mississippi commerce and America's trading rights at New Orleans which had been guaranteed by Spain. From London had come reports of a possible British expedition against New Orleans in view of imminent war between England and France. Livingston used these reports skilfully to press his case. He asked France to cede to America West Florida, New Orleans and part of Louisiana north of the Arkansas River. He was not aware that Spain had not ceded the Floridas to France, the terms of the treaty still being secret. Mentioning Louisiana at all was a shot in the dark and in doing so he had gone outside his instructions.

But fortunately for him, and for the United States, the whole of the plan for French entry into the New World had gone sour on Napoleon. In the first place, the Hispaniola campaign was a disaster. Thirty-five thousand troops had been sent there, and they were being decimated by yellow fever. The Haitians, defending their liberties, were proving hard to subdue. Louisiana was little use to France without Hispaniola and as soon as war came Britain, with its command of the seas, would seize it. Why not sell

Louisiana to the United States? Napoleon asked. Far better to do that than to lose it to Britain.

On 11 April 1803, when Monroe was on his way from Le Havre to Paris, and the day that France broke off diplomatic relations with England, Talleyrand said suddenly to Livingston: "What will you give us for the whole of Louisiana?"

Livingston quickly recovered from his astonishment, and said that he supposed that the United States would be prepared to pay four million dollars.

Talleyrand shook his head. "Too low. Reflect and see me tomorrow."

The following day Monroe arrived in Paris where his friend Fulwar Skipwith, who had been with Monroe on a previous French mission and who was now the American Consul-General, informed him not only of the negotiations which had been going on, but also of Livingston's mortification at Monroe's appointment, and his attempts to steamroller a negotiation through before Monroe's arrival.

Napoleon's proposal to sell Louisiana to the United States was already the talk of French financial circles, and Monroe was immediately approached by the House of Hope and Baring, offering to lend money for the purchase. A preliminary figure of ten million dollars at six per cent was agreed. So far, Monroe had no intention of purchasing the whole of Louisiana. He had no authority to do so.

Negotiations began immediately through François de Barbé-Marbois, Minister of Finance. The Americans discussed the acquisition of New Orleans and territory eastward of the river, the Floridas. Barbé-Marbois told them that Napoleon had decided that he would cede the whole of the territory of Louisiana or nothing. They had to make up their minds quickly and they did not hesitate for long. Napoleon wanted the deal closed at once, requiring the cash for the coming war with England, and so there was no time to send to Washington for new instructions.

By 30 April the deal was closed, and Monroe and Livingston agreed to pay to France the sum of fifteen million dollars (then worth about £3 million) for the territory of Louisiana, an area of a million square miles, about five times the size of continental France, and containing what is perhaps the richest agricultural

region in the world. It was a ridiculously paltry sum for so vast and valuable an acquisition, though it was obvious that at the time neither the vendors nor the purchasers had a clear idea about the extent or potentialities of the territory.

The outright payment to France was sixty million francs ($11,250,000). In addition the United States assumed the claims of her citizens against France to the extent of nearly twenty million francs ($3,750,000). When the interest on the loan had been paid, the final settlement came to $27,267,622, which indicated that the House of Hope and Baring made a good thing out of it as well. Nevertheless, this figure meant that the United States acquired the territory of Louisiana for about four cents per acre, undoubtedly the greatest real estate bargain in all history. It was part of the deal that the existing inhabitants of Louisiana should be granted the rights of American citizens and admission to the Union.

Napoleon wanted the money in order to pursue his fruitless wars in Europe which ruined France, wasted a whole generation of her manhood, and brought Napoleon himself to utter defeat. If he had kept and exploited the Louisiana territory, France would have had great colonial prosperity instead of the illusory military glories of the Napoleonic campaigns.

James Monroe's quarrel with Robert Livingston as to who should take the credit for the Louisiana Purchase is a matter of only academic interest. Monroe's opinion on why Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States for a song is more important.

Raising money for the war with England was of secondary consideration in Monroe's view. He believed that the outcry in America caused by the closing of the port of New Orleans and Napoleon's fear that America would resort to force to maintain their exit to the sea, was the deciding factor. "Had the deposit not been suppressed and the affair turned on the relation between France and England only, we do not think that any proposition of cession to our government . . . would have occurred," Monroe wrote later.

Had the deposit not been stopped of course there would have been no crisis, although it is more than possible that Britain would have seized Louisiana in the ensuing war with France, which would have somewhat altered the subsequent history of the United States, and thrown her relations with Britain once more into the melting pot. It is fairly obvious that seizure by Britain is

really what Napoleon feared, and the idea of getting a quick cash bonus out of Louisiana before he lost it to Britain by force of arms, or even before America seized it in the same way, doubtless appealed to him. Napoleon intended to cut his losses in the New World, seeing that his army had failed so completely in Hispaniola.

Napoleon of course did not know the immense value of the territory he sold to America for so comparatively contemptible a sum. His interest however was not in colonial development, but in martial glory and military conquest. He wished to be the Caesar of the nineteenth century, giving law and administration to his countrymen and becoming the Emperor of Europe. The New World was far away. The riches of unexplored Louisiana were unknown to him. There were no laurels to be earned at New Orleans.

He told Monroe rather magnanimously that he had ceded Louisiana to the United States not so much for the money obtained, but in order to cement the friendship between the two republics of France and America.

The exact limits of the Louisiana Purchase were not defined for they were not precisely known. For years they were in dispute. It was thought at first that it included Texas. How far north the territory reached was uncertain.

Monroe went to Madrid to find out, and also to try to acquire the Floridas which Spain had declined to cede to France. He also sought indemnity for the damage to United States commerce by the action of the Spanish governor in suppressing American trade at New Orleans.

He got very little out of the Spanish, who refused to accept any responsibility for damage to American trade. According to the Spanish archives, he was told, the boundaries of Louisiana were set between the Rio Grande on the west and the Perdido River on the east. How far the territory extended northwards, the Spaniards were not prepared to say, but with the western boundary set on the Rio Grande it obviously included Texas.

It is likely that the claim that Texas was included in the purchase arose out of some confusion in Madrid during Monroe's negotiations. Texas was then a Spanish colony, separate from Louisiana, but living in harmony with it. It is not likely that Madrid would have knowingly given it away in the Louisiana deal. They flatly refused to cede either East or West Florida to the United States,

and so their setting of the western boundary of Louisiana on the Rio Grande (which they called the Rio Bravo) is likely to have been a bureaucratic error.

Spain, in short, disapproved of the territories being ceded to America, and to Monroe they complained of misrepresentation and abuse in the American press. Spain did not press her objections to the transfer which was contrary to the original terms of her agreement with Napoleon of 1800. France had given Spain a pledge that they would not dispose of the province to a third power.

It soon became evident that Monroe and Livingston had negotiated a rather shaky deal, which was both illegal and defective at several points. Not only had Napoleon broken his pledge to Spain by selling Louisiana to the United States, but he had also violated the constitution of France which laid down that no territory could be alienated without a vote of the legislature. Louisiana was still in Spanish hands, and Napoleon had disposed of territories of which he was not in fact in possession. And the territory negotiated was so vague and undefined that no one knew precisely how far it extended to the east and the west, let alone into the unexplored north. If it included West Florida, then Spain disputed this.

Some purists in Washington said that the purchase itself was contrary to the American constitution, basing this view upon an interpretation which held that the federal government possessed no power not expressly granted, and therefore the President could not incorporate territories into the United States in this manner, nor promise their inhabitants citizenship.

The treaty however was ratified in the Senate following a letter from Livingston urging immediate ratification before Napoleon changed his mind.

The transfer went through without any of the anticipated difficulties. On 30 November 1803 the Spanish governor formally handed over Louisiana to a French prefect who three weeks later handed it over to the United States. The lower part of the province was taken over at New Orleans on 20 December and the upper part at St Louis on 9 March 1804. About eighty thousand inhabitants were granted American citizenship.

America had yet to explore her splendid purchase, for nobody knew quite what had been acquired. The exploration of the

Louisiana Purchase was placed in the hands of two army officers, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, whose expedition had been authorized by Jefferson even before the purchase. Their original object was to find a water route from the headwaters of the Missouri to the Pacific.

The Lewis and Clark expedition was a classic piece of exploration and survey. They crossed the Rockies and reached the Pacific at the mouth of the Columbia River, and then returned across the continent to St Louis with their party intact and with the distinction of having had good relations with the Indians all the way. The Lewis and Clark journals remain as a valuable source of information on the Far West in the early nineteenth century.

By the acquisition of Louisiana the United States acquired a territory so vast that it doubled its size. Louisiana was eventually split up into the following states: Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

But for the purchase, the great expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century would have been impossible. For a mere fifteen million dollars Napoleon gave America that which enabled it to become a great power. Without the Louisiana territory the present United States would not have been possible. It gave it the control of and access to some of the most fertile land and the richest mineral wealth on the face of the earth. It gave it control of the Mississippi River which for decades remained the central highway of North America. It was the gateway to the West, the settlement of which made the United States a two-ocean power. It enabled Americans to turn their eyes from the troubles of warring Europe to the vast lands of the West and to concentrate upon developing the greatest and richest lands that ever fell to the lot of modern man. The Louisiana Purchase was the greatest gift a nation ever had. It made America what she is.

Further, it enabled James Monroe, the man who negotiated it, to enunciate the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, in which he declared that the American continents "are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European power".

It is certain that Napoleon did not dream that he was making such a handsome present to the United States. He was not the sort of man who made mistakes like that.



The Prelude to Waterloo

On the afternoon of 27 February 1815 the brig *Inconstant*, crowded with armed men in greatcoats and bearskins, was sailing towards the French mainland from the Isle of Elba when she encountered a French warship from Toulon. Hastily the grenadiers removed their bearskins and lay down on the deck in order that their highly unusual presence on the innocent brig should not be seen by the inquiring eyes on the warship.

"Where are you bound?" asked the man-of-war.

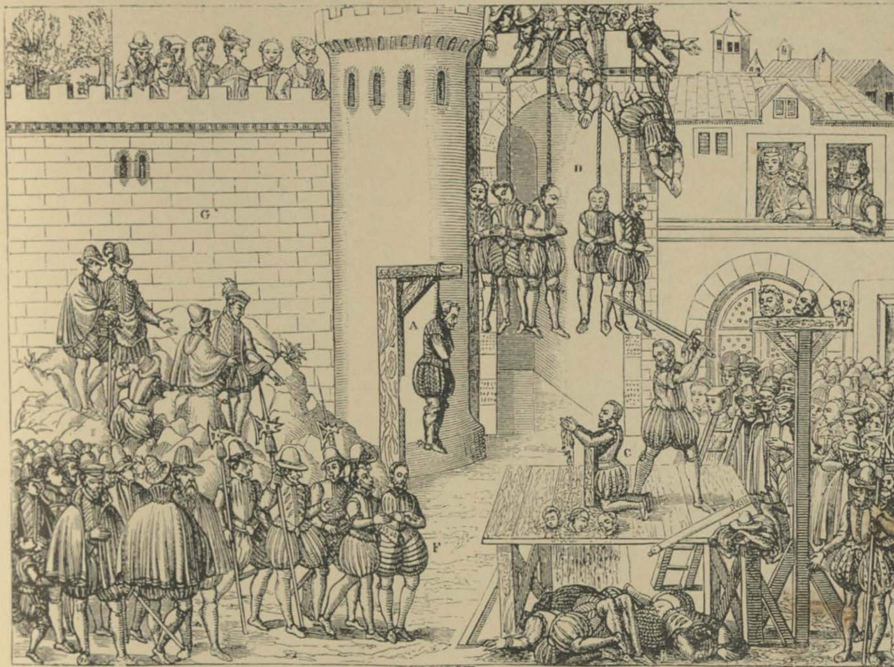
"For Genoa," replied the brig. "Have you any messages?"

"No," was the answer. "And how is the great man?"

"Wonderfully well," the brig replied, the officer on the deck being prompted in his reply by the great man himself who stood beside him.

The two ships drew apart. The unwary warship made for Leghorn, unaware that she had witnessed the escape of Napoleon from Elba.

Napoleon is one of the great figures of history. No man ever made such an impress on his age. He towers over the nineteenth

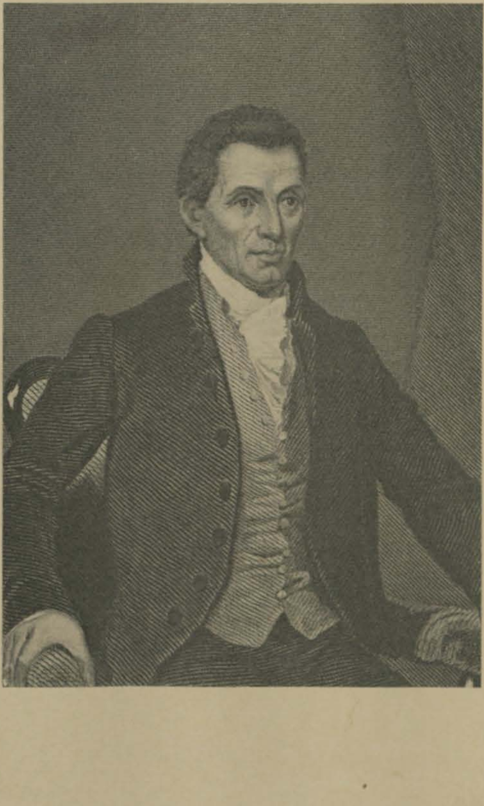


The aftermath of the Tumult of Amboise, when 1,200 plotters were executed there in 1560 after a Protestant conspiracy was discovered against the Catholic government of France. The bitter wars of religion were ended by the Edict of Nantes in 1598. When Louis XIV revoked the Edict in 1685 hundreds of thousands of Huguenots, France's most valuable citizens economically, fled the country.



The quarrel between the British colonists in America and the home government under George III and Lord North was mainly over the question of paying taxes to England which had not been voted in the Colonial assemblies. In 1768 Redcoats protecting the Customs Commissioners at Boston fired on a jeering mob, killing five and seriously wounding six others.





Napoleon's escape from Elba was the most romantic and daring feat of his tremendous career. He believed this last heroic fling was part of his destiny, but it brought defeat to himself and catastrophe to his people. At first his reception in France was cool, but the people of Grenoble tore down the city gates and threw them at his feet.

James Monroe, the agent of the biggest real estate bargain in history. In 1800 Louisiana stretched from New Orleans to Canada in the north and to the Rockies in the West. Acquired from Spain by France, it was offered for sale by Napoleon, who wanted money to finance his invasion of England. James Monroe went to Paris and secured Louisiana for America for a mere $15,000,000.

century and leaves an enormous shadow behind him. He was unforgettable – feared and adored, cursed and blessed. Unlike Hitler, he was not an evil man as well as a genius. France has reason to revere his memory, for he did great good as well as great harm.

His escape from Elba was the most romantic and daring feat of his tremendous career. It was a desperate gamble which aroused the sentimental passion of his countrymen to such heights that they rallied around him in a way which astonished the world and still puzzles us today. After all, they had suffered enormously at his hands. France's economy had been ruined by his wars. He had bled her white. For him a whole generation had died in battle. France's widows were legion.

Judged by any standards, the Hundred Days between Elba and Waterloo were a disaster. The return from Elba was inevitable so far as Napoleon was concerned; he was only forty-five, at the height of his powers, a man of great gifts, immense energy, ardent imagination, political genius. His faith in his own destiny was complete. Although he did not over-estimate the power he had over the minds of his countrymen, or misjudge the unrest which existed in France since the restoration of the Bourbons, it was a serious miscalculation of the international situation to imagine that the Allies did not have the power to challenge his return.

The Hundred Days had dire consequences for France – military occupation, a harsh peace and the end of French ascendancy, which thereafter passed to her old enemy, Britain.

When Napoleon became First Consul after the *coup d'état* of 18 Brumaire (9 November 1799), Revolutionary France was in chaos and on the verge of anarchy. He restored order and repaired the administration which had broken down during the Revolution. He brought a measure of liberalism and freedom to France, granted amnesty to *émigrés* who had fled abroad, reorganized the legal system, local administration and the educational system. The Civil Code was his greatest achievement.

There had been a great deal of sympathy in England for the Revolution, even after the execution of Louis XVI which caused much resentment throughout Europe. Many leading English politicians, such as Fox, refused to take part in government during the whole of the Napoleonic wars, and thought that England

should have accepted Napoleon's hand of friendship which he proffered when he became First Consul in 1799. Later, Napoleon's formidable conquests and threatened invasion of England deprived the pro-French lobby of much of its support. When national security was threatened, England united against the enemy. England had given a remarkable demonstration of its genius for political freedom, by being able to fight for its life while being divided politically and retaining its age-old liberties. England's brilliant performances at Trafalgar and in the Peninsular War gave her enormous prestige in the world.

Napoleon believed that an overwhelming victory on the continent would compel England to yield. He persisted in this delusion throughout his career. His great enemy was always England, and so long as England remained mistress of the seas she remained unimpressed by Napoleon's land victories. Napoleon's military thinking was continental, England's was maritime. Neither could cancel out the other. Yet Napoleon persisted in his belief that England would capitulate in consequence of his massive victories on the continent. Hitler made the same mistake in 1940. In the Napoleonic wars Britain had been as victorious at sea as Napoleon had been on land. Everywhere the Royal Navy was supreme.

Napoleon never recovered from the Russian disaster. Of his army of 600,000 who marched to Moscow barely 20,000, tattered and typhus-ridden, returned. Napoleon's subject countries in Eastern Europe watched stony-eyed as the ragged spectres of the Grand Army passed, knowing their hour of deliverance was at hand. "The unspeakable misery of the Grand Army did not escape the bitterest derision," wrote a spectator as the survivors passed through Berlin.

Despite the loss of prestige caused by the Russian disaster – which he chose to call an accident – Napoleon was able to raise another army in 1813 to subdue Germany, which, backed by Russia and England, revolted against French rule and began the German War of Liberation.

It was the beginning of the end. Outnumbered, if not outgeneralled, Napoleon was hard-pressed on all sides by the Allies and was soon fighting on French soil. In March 1814 they were in Paris where Talleyrand agreed to the restoration of the Bourbons.

Napoleon abdicated, and was, in seeming derision, given

sovereignty over the island of Elba, a battalion of the Imperial Guard, and an income.

It was not possible to turn the clock back in France, too much had happened between 1789 and 1814. Napoleon led France to glory – and then to ruin, but the Bourbons, returning "in the baggage wagons of the enemy", provoked deep resentment by their efforts to revive a past which had been destroyed with so much blood and pain. Louis XVIII, brother of the executed king, struck the wrong note at his restoration by referring to it as the nineteenth year of his reign. A fat old gentleman suffering from gout, Louis exercized more wisdom than his entourage who returned with him from exile. He was not insensitive to what had happened in France. He ruled constitutionally, retained the Napoleonic institutions and made no attempt to restore the *ancien régime*. But the royalists, back in power and anxious to revive a past which was beyond recall were bigoted and vindictive, eager to avenge the wrongs of the Revolution. They were understandably detested and the country split into two bitterly opposed factions.

There was great dissatisfaction in the army. The disbandment of the Imperial Guard, of which every Frenchman was intensely proud, caused considerable resentment. Prominent officials and dignitaries who had been appointed by Napoleon were thrust aside to make room for returning emigrant nobles, whom the mass of the people regarded as traitors to their country.

A year of Bourbon rule was sufficient to make many Frenchmen forget the sufferings caused by their Emperor's endless wars which had wasted the flower of French manhood. Their hearts turned once more to the imperial exile waiting impatiently on his island prison.

Napoleon was kept well informed of the events in France and the feeling of the people; he believed that France would soon want him back. It was merely a question of choosing the right moment to return.

Meanwhile the great Congress of Vienna was taking place. In the gay Austrian capital a glittering international company assembled. Monarchs and statesmen, with their satellites and female embellishments gathered at the most sumptuous and sparkling international conference in all history to settle the tangled affairs of Europe.

It had already taken all winter and was dominated by Tsar Alexander I of Russia, who considered himself the chief architect of the allied victory. The host was the Austrian Emperor Francis I, aided by his Chancellor Prince Metternich. Supporting the Tsar was Frederick William III, King of Prussia. Castlereagh was the plenipotentiary of Great Britain, and Talleyrand represented King Louis XVIII of France.

In between the dances, the banquets and the gaiety, there was much intrigue, as was to be expected. France was well represented by Talleyrand, a brilliant and sophisticated diplomat, who while pretending to ask for nothing skilfully fanned the flames of discord, and even managed to persuade Castlereagh and Metternich to sign a secret treaty between England, Austria and France against Russia and Prussia. In February 1815 the Duke of Wellington replaced Lord Castlereagh as the representative of England and suffered greatly from the overheated rooms of the Viennese palaces.

The laughter and the music came to a sudden end in March when the news arrived that the Corsican ogre had broken out of his island prison and was on the rampage again. Metternich summoned the ministers of the four powers to his palace and informed them of the news. Swift messengers were despatched to arrest allied demobilization. Talleyrand was furious, knowing well what this would mean for France. "This enemy and disturber of the peace of the world," he said, "has placed himself outside the pale of civil and social relations."

Confining Napoleon to Elba had been Alexander I's romantic idea. Wellington exploded, for Britain had never been party to the silly arrangement of setting up a burlesque emperor at the very doors of France. Still Britain had to join with her allies in a new crusade to crush finally and for ever this dangerous and lawless man. Parliament voted £90 million for the purpose. Vast armies were promised – Austria 300,000 men, Russia 225,000, Prussia 236,000, the rest of Germany 150,000, Holland 50,000, Great Britain 150,000. Britain being the richest power promised to provide the lion's share of the money. Thus the allies planned to put more than a million men in the field for the final settlement with Napoleon.

Bonaparte had landed on the French coast at Golfe Juan, near

Cannes, together with his private army of a thousand Imperial Guards, on the first day of March. News was slow to travel in those days. Marseilles did not hear about it until the 3rd, and Lyons on the morning of the 5th. From Lyons to Paris there was a semaphore system and the news reached the capital on the same day. Metternich heard the news in Vienna on the 7th. It came to him by letter from the Austrian Consul-General at Genoa. It was a bald statement to the effect that Napoleon had disappeared from the island of Elba. At that time the rulers of Europe had no idea where he was or what his plans were. It was several days later that they learned that he had landed near Cannes.

At first Napoleon's reception was not encouraging. When he had passed through Provence to Elba after his abdication, the populace had jeered, and might easily have manhandled him, and his return was not welcome. Antibes refused to admit him to the town, and crowds shouted: "*Vive le roi! A bas Napoleon!*" At Grasse the local population greeted him with indifference.

In view of this reception, Napoleon decided to take the mountain road to Grenoble, thereafter known as the *Route Napoleon*. The unenthusiastic reception given to them by the Provençals depressed some of his followers, to whom it seemed a desperate venture, but Napoleon himself was full of confidence.

The road ended at Grasse, and the little company of adventurers took the mountain path to Castellane. In a mountain hut Napoleon found an old woman. He asked her what was the news from Paris. She looked at him blankly, not knowing who he was. Paris was as remote as China to her. She had no idea what was going on. Napoleon asked her whether she knew what the king was doing.

The old woman looked puzzled. "The king? Don't you mean the Emperor? Napoleon rules in Paris."

Napoleon left, wondering what was the use of trying to impose his name upon the world. But his resolution did not waver, and he continued.

At Castellane, which had been warned of his approach, his reception was more encouraging. The Emperor was welcomed, his little army revictualled, and Napoleon continued, promising the sub-prefect promotion when he reached Paris.

As he progressed, his reception grew warmer. At Gap the people rejoiced, rang the bells and illuminated the town. At

Grenoble he was confronted by a battalion of troops barring his path. He just walked towards them alone, saying, "Soldiers of the fifth, don't you know me?" There was an instant shout of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" and they fell in behind him. Grenoble opened its gates to him ecstatically. It was the same all the way to Paris.

Napoleon told the French people that he had returned to defend their interests, to give them back the liberties won in the Revolution and now endangered by the restoration of the Bourbons. To the army he promised glory and the end of their humiliation at the hands of the returned *émigrés*.

Everywhere regiments sent to oppose him acclaimed him as Emperor and joined his standard. At Auxerre, Marshal Ney, who in a foolish moment had promised Louis XVIII to bring him back in a cage, instead warmly embraced his old commander. Though a brave and brilliant soldier, Ney was the most indiscreet of men with the unfortunate habit of always saying the wrong thing. His defection to Napoleon, after having sworn allegiance to Louis, later cost him his life.

The anger of the royalists turned to alarm as Napoleon's approach to Paris became a march of triumph. On 20 March Louis and his court packed up and fled. On the same evening Napoleon entered Paris in his carriage, escorted by a modest half-dozen Lancers. Cheering crowds lined the route.

Although the reaction of the people seemed heartening enough, there were many who did not cheer, and were not swayed to passionate enthusiasm by the return of the country's idol. There were those who remembered too many things – the widows who now worked in the fields instead of the men, Napoleon's lavish ball at the Tuileries after his return from the dreadful Russian campaign, when it seemed to some that they were dancing on tombs, and the Emperor's remark to Metternich a few months after that: "A man such as I is not much concerned over the lives of a million men."

Incensed at the silence of some of the crowds, the Guards struck them with the flat of their swords and ordered them to cry out: "*Vive Napoleon! Vive liberté!*"

Napoleon was not only a military genius, but a brilliant politician who could gauge exactly the mood of the people. He knew it was no use coming back as a martial hero promising more war

and glory. He publicly proclaimed himself a changed man. He had given up warlike ambitions. The welfare of France was all that concerned him.

It was the Revolution which had given him the chance to display his great talents and achieve his world-shaking ambitions. With considerable subtlety he now awoke the memories of the Revolution, warning the people that they stood in danger of losing what they had gained, that the royalists and *émigrés* intended to revive the payment of tithes, and the hated rights and privileges of the seigneur. He had come to free them from bondage and serfdom.

To the liberals he declared he would rule as a constitutional sovereign. There would be representative government and the freedom of the press. He set up a parliamentary system with two chambers, peers and representatives.

This new Napoleon, imbued with the principles of the Revolution, declared that his policy was peace with the allies. He despatched messengers to every court, offering to accept the terms of the Treaty of Paris, and announcing his peaceful intentions.

But the allies refused even to answer these communications. They declared that his promises may have deceived the French, but they were not deceived by them. Napoleon was already declared an outlaw. No one at the Congress of Vienna thought that appeasement with him was possible. Not one nation was prepared to countenance his return to power. He had scourged and shaken Europe too much for it to be otherwise.

In England there was Parliamentary opposition to the policy of answering Napoleon with force. But the idea of dealing with Bonaparte in a liberal and reasonable, rather than a fanatically warlike manner, did not commend itself to the English public generally. After long years of inexorable war, they had come to regard the Corsican as a great human enemy only to be destroyed. Moreover, the Oppositions' view of tolerating Napoleon in power after all the suffering and sacrifice which had been made to dethrone him and destroy his armies seemed illogical.

All the powers snubbed Napoleon's pacific and friendly overtures. The Prince Regent returned his letter unopened. Napoleon's emissaries to Austria were seized at the border, arrested and searched.

In 1810 Napoleon had married Marie Louise, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Emperor Francis I of Austria. Despite the difference in their ages, the marriage had been a success, and when he went to Elba she at first wanted to join him, but was prevented from doing so by her father.

The Emperor of Austria had been forced to give his daughter to Napoleon. It was the penalty of defeat and she was demanded by Napoleon as the price of peace. Francis never forgave Napoleon for that, and after Elba he revenged himself upon his son-in-law by not only preventing Marie Louise from going to Elba but by deliberately throwing a lover in her path. This was Count Neipperg, a cultivated and fascinating ladies' man, who was supposed to be her escort and adviser, and with whom she fell in love. She became his mistress and fell out of love with Napoleon, much to the approval of her father who felt his revenge was complete.

In Paris Napoleon tried hard to get Marie Louise to join him, but she refused. When he heard of her infidelity, he was bitterly wounded, particularly as it was the subject of many jokes.

His followers still flocked to his banner, but the enthusiasm of the old days was gone. In Paris the atmosphere was different to what it had been in the provinces. The great welcome he had received on his arrival in the capital had come only from the military and time-servers seeking their old offices. The citizens of Paris were not enthusiastic. Twenty years of war had left them listless, and even the brilliant daring of his escape from Elba failed to stir them. Such enthusiasm as he encountered in Paris, he discovered, did not come from the respectable, hard-working middle-classes, but from the idle and unruly section of the population with whom he had no sympathy. He found active hostility towards him from members of the professional classes. This was not the Paris he had known.

Napoleon's horizon was clouded with sinister forebodings. His old faith seemed to have left him. He was restless, nervous, tired more easily. He could not trust those around him any more. His ministers were dealing with the enemy behind his back, ensuring their future should the magic of his genius fail and France once more be thrown helpless to the Allies. Fouché, his Minister of Police, was in touch with Metternich in order to salvage as much as possible from the disaster which Napoleon's return was bring-

ing upon France. Fouché wanted to force Napoleon's abdication and thus avoid war.

Talleyrand had remained in Vienna. He was France's greatest statesman in this hour. He utterly repudiated Napoleon and he remained with the allies working to make the inevitable peace settlement less onerous for France.

In this menacing and uncomfortable atmosphere, Napoleon set about recalling over a hundred thousand men to the colours. The call-up was not popular. The prospect of war and invasion aroused much discontent. In the towns trade would be ruined, except for those selling equipment to the army. The failure of Marie Louise to join her consort in Paris caused people to question the Emperor's security.

Despite these ominous difficulties, there was a feeling throughout Europe that Napoleon possessed some power which made him invincible. He was regarded with a superstitious awe with which few other men in the world have been invested. In 1815 he probably had as many admirers among the camp of his enemies as he did in France, where he was open to so much criticism, and where at last his magic was beginning to fail. Many English people hero-worshipped him, even though he was the national bogeyman, and they had been thrilled by his daring escape from Elba, his triumphal progress through France and the extraordinary magnetism he exercised over the French people. Here was no little man, no ordinary outlaw. This man had the quality of greatness, like Hannibal and Alexander. Napoleon was one of the giants. But, whatever his fascination, he was a danger to Europe, and no one thought of treating with him.

The armies gathered. Two hundred thousand Russians were marching towards Alsace. Blücher was in Belgium with a hundred and fifty thousand Prussians. One hundred and fifty thousand Austrians were ready to march into France.

The smallest contingent was the British, who for various reasons had failed to assemble the promised 150,000. The best regiments, the Peninsular veterans, were in the United States which in 1813 had entered the war on the side of France. Britain sent a mere 21,000 across the Channel. Britain's two main contributions to Waterloo, however, were Wellington and the money to fight the battle.

Facing this enormous allied force was a French army of 70,000 seasoned veterans, equipped with the finest artillery in the world and led by the greatest military genius of the age. In June this army invaded Belgium and Napoleon joined his troops on the 14th. On the 16th he drove Blücher back at Ligny, while Ney attacked the British at Quatre Bras.

Wellington was in command of an army of 42,000 Germans and Netherlanders, in addition to the "thin red line" of 21,000 British. On the night of 15 June a great ball was given in Brussels by the fabulously wealthy Duchess of Richmond which had been attended by Wellington and all the principal officers of the British and allied armies. Brussels was packed with fashionable visitors from England who had come in the wake of the army. After all, British money was paying for the whole show. Halfway through the famous ball, Wellington and his officers stole away.

The battle did not begin until the 18th, and it was fought on the rain-soaked plains of Waterloo. Napoleon's plan was to destroy Wellington's army before it could regain contact with Blücher's Prussians. Wellington held the Château of Hougomont, and his thin red line yielded ground under Napoleon's pressure, but did not break, despite Ney's furious cavalry charges, and the onslaught of the Imperial Guard. The arrival of Blücher's army turned the scales and the French fled.

While Napoleon escaped to Paris, Wellington remained on the field, leaving the Prussians to pursue the disordered Imperial Guard.

The Iron Duke sat on his horse gazing sadly at the dead and wounded which bestrewed the blood-soaked plain of Waterloo in heaps.

"My heart is broken," he wrote immediately after the battle, "by the terrible loss I have sustained in my old friends and companions and my poor soldiers. Believe me, nothing except the battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won." Wellington's attitude is in complete contrast to Napoleon's utter indifference to human life and suffering.

In Paris Napoleon was received with hostility. All was lost now. There was only one course, a second abdication. He was abandoned. Everyone was against him. He wanted to leave Rochefort for America, but an English warship, the *Bellerophon*, was

blockading the harbour. He decided to ask asylum of the British government. He wrote the following letter to the Prince Regent:

"Royal Highness – Exposed to the factions which distract my country and to the enmity of the greatest powers of Europe, I have ended my political career, and I come, like Themistocles, to appeal to the hospitality of the British people. I put myself under the protection of their laws and beg Your Royal Highness, as the most powerful and most determined and the most generous of my enemies, to grant me this protection."

Britain had no intention of giving asylum to the Corsican. The allies in fact did not know what to do with him. They hoped he would do the decent thing and commit suicide. Alternatively they would have preferred Louis XVIII – already remounted on the French throne – to have him tried and executed. But Louis was not such a fool as that. He was unpopular enough with his subjects as it was. Napoleon, though he had been prepared to die at Waterloo, was not prepared to take his own life.

Britain decided the issue and sent him to St Helena, and on this lonely island in the South Atlantic, Napoleon spent the rest of his days dictating his memoirs and quarrelling with his British jailers.

Here in March 1821 in his fifty-second-year he died of cancer, saying in his will: 'I am dying before my time, murdered by the English oligarchy and its hired assassin." The "hired assassin" was the governor of the island, who kept an uncomfortably close watch on him in view of the rumours of an attempted escape.

As for France, the escape from Elba brought upon her not only the humiliating defeat of Waterloo, but a very much harsher peace settlement than had been agreed before Elba. The famous escape added to the Napoleonic legend greatly at the expense of France.



Blunders in India

The Indian Mutiny was probably the most murderous and bloody uprising in the long history of imperialism. Rarely have subject peoples turned upon their rulers with such savage violence. It was not however an uprising of the Indian people, but merely of the Sepoy troops. It was not supported by either the Indian princes or the Indian people generally. The horrors and brutalities committed by the mutineers were of a nature quite foreign to the Indian people, who were as much horrified by the ruthless way the British suppressed it as they were by the atrocities of the Mutiny itself.

There were many causes for the Mutiny. Indian troops being made to bite bullets greased with the fat of the sacred cow was the immediate occasion of the uprising, not the cause. England blamed the East India Company which had ruled India for centuries with great profit to itself. History, however, puts the blame fairly and squarely upon Britain which for centuries shirked its responsibilities in India, and made the East India Company administer the country, a job which should have been undertaken by Britain itself.

The original East India Company had its charter granted to it by

Queen Elizabeth I in 1600. This instrument granted to "the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies" trading rights in the East Indies which then meant all countries lying east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan, a vast territory indeed, embracing three quarters of the globe. The Company had an original capital of £72,000 and one hundred and twenty-five shareholders.

At first its trading voyages ranged far and wide and included Japan. In 1610, its charter having been renewed *in perpetuum* by James I, it built its first factories in India, and in competition with other European nations began trading seriously with the Indians.

The famous East Indiamen were built in the company's shipyard at Deptford, and were for a century and more the finest merchant ships in the world, capable of holding their own not only against the Malay pirates, but against the armed vessels of the company's rival traders from Holland, Portugal and France. Even in the seventeenth century there was an element of piracy and freebooting about mercantile trading, especially in Eastern waters.

It took a century of conflict with its European rivals for the English East India Company to gain virtual monopoly of the trade of India. At first it adopted a policy of armed trading, but in the latter part of the seventeenth century this policy was abandoned owing to the warlike attitude of the native rulers in Madras and Bengal and the aggressive trading methods of the Dutch.

"John Company", as it was called, then expected its employees "to establish such a policy of civil and military power, and create and secure such a large revenue as may be the foundation of a large, well-grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come".

The die was thus cast and the East India Company became an administrative and ruling body as well as a trading concern. By the end of the eighteenth century it was enormously prosperous as well as powerful, with its own army and administrative staffs. So lucrative was the India trade that a second East India Company was competing for it. In 1708 these two companies were combined under a charter granted by Queen Anne, and the United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies was formed.

Thus India was handed over to the traders, the merchant adventurers of the City of London, and the East India Company

was permitted to develop from an armed trading corporation into what has been described as an Asiatic power.

Britain was by then a great imperial nation, but it shirked its imperial responsibilities in India for a further century and a half, even though it was exploiting the country by every means in its power, plundering it of its wealth, and subduing its restless rulers with the gun and the sword.

This abdication of national responsibility by the government of Westminster had dire consequences for both India and Britain, though it is impossible to tell how differently things would have turned out if Queen Anne had instituted British Imperial rule in India in 1702, instead of handing it over to John Company, which as the century progressed found itself in a position of unprecedented power. Never in the history of commercial enterprise has so much power been vested in the hands of a body of private traders. It possessed its own private army and administrative department. No laws bound its proceedings in India. There was no one to challenge it. It could do just as it pleased and was circumscribed only by the force it was able to exert upon the princes and rulers of the country it was exploiting.

Its employees loaded themselves with rich spoils. Even its humblest clerks and the troopers of its private army returned to England rich with booty. Many of them imitated the luxurious and ostentatious life of the Indian aristocracy on their return to England, where they were known as nabobs, a term which combined contempt with envy. Many of them entered Parliament and after the 1768 election became a powerful political lobby.

John Corneille, who served at Madras in the seventeen-fifties, wrote an illuminating account of life there under the Company's rule. The Governor of Madras was the senior merchant, who achieved his status by seniority not by merit. The great enemy of the English in India in those days was boredom and the great killer was overeating. Dinner was taken in the midday heat and would often consist of fifteen courses washed down with vast quantities of local and imported wines.

The Company's most famous employees were Robert Clive and Warren Hastings. Though their names are inscribed with honour in the pages of British imperialism, they were not much honoured during their day. Clive returned fabulously rich to

England after a brilliant career as soldier and administrator – but he was violently attacked for the great wealth he had acquired. Warren Hastings on his return was impeached for cruelty, fraud, bribery and robbery.

Against this scandalous background these two men laid the foundation of British India. Clive was something of a military genius and he completely established British supremacy in the Indian peninsula by 1761, with the result that the East India Company found itself not only dealing in the spices, jewels and luxury goods of India, but in the revenue and territories of the princes as well.

England's failure to exert any effective control and supervision over the Company's powerful empire was one of her great mistakes in the eighteenth century, and one which led directly to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, for which the Company was blamed. But the true blame lay with the British Government, which had consistently failed to appreciate the situation in India in the same way as it failed to do in America.

To eighteenth-century England, India was a land of mystery, remote and fascinating, to which adventurous young men went and returned many years later laden with wealth and the fleshly evidence of years of indulgent living. To most Englishmen India remained romantically unreal, far away and inaccessible. It was not surprising therefore that England exercised little control over what was done there in her name.

The home government was more concerned with milking the Company's vast profits. In 1708 the Company was required to "lend" the nation £3,200,000, and in the reigns of the first two Georges the charter was extended conditional upon the Company making further large loans to the exchequer, which of course it was well able to afford out of its inflated profits.

It was Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757, following the Black Hole of Calcutta, that had made the Company a ruling power in India, and Parliament thought it desirable that it should have some control over the territories the Company administered. But, although both Clive and Warren Hastings were made Governors, there was no effective control from London over what went on in India. In 1773 Hastings was raised to the status of Governor-General, and the India Bill of 1784 created a government depart-

ment for India affairs whose job was to exercise political, military and financial control over British possessions in India. A further bill in 1813 imposed a governmental control over the Company's financial transactions and abolished its monopoly of Indian trade.

None of these measures touched the real issue which was administration, and this was still left in the hands of John Company. While Westminster was concerned with abolishing trading monopolies in the interests of the City of London, the question of the government of India itself was never properly and honestly faced. Broad supervision over the administration of a private company which was ruling the lives of millions of Indians was no substitute for proper colonial rule.

By the end of the eighteenth century Britain was a great empire and a first-class power, yet it continued to shirk its responsibilities in India for a further half-century, when the Indian Mutiny finally and utterly discredited the Company's rule, and underlined the grave mistakes of generations of British rulers at Westminster who had scandalously neglected the Indian peoples while their countrymen were exploiting them.

Every unscrupulous means was used to loot India. With the power of the British Army behind them, the Company's employees were able to force the princes to disgorge their wealth. Not unnaturally the Indian rulers had developed a great hatred for their English overlords, and there were constant wars, rebellions, massacres and outrages. Indian government of the eighteenth century was a welter of bribery and corruption in which all joined, from the highest to the lowest, so thoroughly had the Company's rule debased and demoralized Indian life.

The history of the Company during this century is one of cynical double-dealing, ruthless corruption and brutal oppression. They concentrated in making money out of the quarrels and ambitions of the various Indian princes by offering the Company's services and military protection to the highest bidder.

A typical instance of this was the affair of the Rajah of Tanjore who had been guaranteed the security of his throne by the Company in 1762 for a large consideration. However, Mohammed Ali, the Nabob of the Carnatic, another and more powerful ally of the Company, wanted to grab the territory of Tanjore for himself, and he offered the Company a larger sum for their compliance in

the seizure. Even though the Company had officially guaranteed to the Rajah of Tanjore that they would protect his territories, its officials did not hesitate to close with Mohammed Ali's more lucrative offer, and in 1771 the Company's troops invaded and occupied Tanjore, arrested the Rajah and his family, and handed over the whole of his territories and possessions to the Nabob of the Carnatic.

This caused such a scandal in England that the East India Company were compelled to despatch Lord Pigot to Madras to redress the wrongs of the outraged Rajah and restore him to his territories. But the Company's high-handed officials in Madras refused to brook interference even from their employers at home. They placed Pigot under arrest and he died in prison before the angry authorities in London could order his release.

This was only one of the many scandals which outraged public opinion in England at that time. Among the more sensational was the robbery of more than a million pounds from the Begums of Oudh, mother and granddaughter of the spendthrift Nabob of Oudh, who were reputed to have three million pounds' worth of gold and treasure hidden in their palace at Fizabad. These old ladies were rigorously imprisoned by the East India Company's thugs, and their stewards were tortured until they revealed the whereabouts of the Begums' treasure.

Warren Hastings was charged with this and other crimes at his trial before the House of Lords in 1788. For seven years he defended himself against charges of "high crimes and misdemeanours", and was finally, in 1795, found innocent of all of them. But these crimes were certainly committed by servants of the East India Company, and were never redressed.

Hastings – who was certainly guilty of mistakes, but who has been called the greatest of all Anglo-Indian administrators – was the scapegoat for the accumulated sins of John Company.

Despite these scandals and outrages, for which the victims in India never received justice, the British Parliament in 1793 voted for the continuation of the Company. The true state of affairs in India did not force itself upon the nation's attention until the blood bath of 1857, the full horror of which has never been told.

After the way they had been abused and oppressed by the Company, it was perhaps surprising that the princes and rulers

of India did not unite in rebellion and drive them out of their country. But this did not happen. The Mutiny was merely a mutiny of troops, not a spontaneous uprising of the Indian people. Indeed most of them had no sympathy for it. Its cause was the soldiers' grievances. It had more to do with pay and conditions than the alleged greasing of cartridges with the fat of the sacred cow and the abhorred pig – the former holy to the Hindu, the latter an abomination to the Mohammedan. These emotional grievances were made much of by the agitators, but were not in themselves sufficient to produce such widespread violence and appalling atrocities.

The Mutiny happened at a time when the Company's brutal abuses of the eighteenth century were a mere memory. By the eighteen-fifties it was no longer a trading concern and its political power had long since been transferred to the Ministers of the Crown. It was in fact little more than a government agency.

Among the causes of the Mutiny was unrest at the speed of modernization and westernization brought about by the mechanical revolution which made transport to India easier.

The advent of the Englishwoman to India in the first half of the nineteenth century had a profound effect. It is significant that the worst and most revolting atrocities of the Mutiny were perpetrated upon Englishwomen.

Previous to the nineteenth century the Company's officials settled in India until it was time to retire, and were assimilated into Indian life and culture. They were Indianized and became part of the system. The Company did not interfere in the domestic life of the States. India was used to foreign rulers and throughout the centuries had assimilated them. This happened to a large extent during the rule of the Company in the eighteenth century.

For the Company's servants England was a long and uncomfortable sea journey away. They found it better to stay in India. They took native wives or concubines and became more or less integrated into Indian life. There was little or no race prejudice in those times.

With the nineteenth century came the mechanical revolution, which made transport to India much easier. The result was that the Company's officials went home to England more often, and – most significantly – brought out their wives and families.

When the Englishwomen first came to India they were shocked

at the laxness and immoralities of their menfolk. They frowned not only upon Indian concubines, but at the thought of an Englishman taking an Indian wife and living in the Indian style. The result was that the Englishmen gave up their Indianization and became conspicuously European. The ban on intermarriage resulted naturally in the growth of racial prejudice, which was the Englishwoman's peculiar gift to India. It did not exist before her arrival. Whether or not it would have existed if she had not gone there is impossible to say.

The Englishwomen persuaded their hitherto tolerant countrymen to interfere more vigorously with Indian customs which did not meet with the approval of the Western mind. This led swiftly to the colour bar, with its grave and menacing consequences for the future, and the Englishwomen of the mid-nineteenth century have been held responsible for its institution in India; certainly before their arrival it was almost unknown.

Then followed the railways, the telegraph and the missionaries, all of which helped to destroy traditional India. The missionaries did not make many converts, though they created a great deal of damaging scepticism in the minds of Indians about their traditional religions.

Higher education for Indians, with European instead of Asiatic sciences and literature as the subjects, was another aspect of the increasing westernisation which caused discontent, particularly among the soldiers. The Crimean War had the effect of lowering the prestige of the British Army and helped to give the Bengal Sepoys an exaggerated idea of their own importance. They believed that the military security of India lay in their hands.

To this background of discontent and unrest the East India Company contributed the spark by issuing the bullets greased with the fat of cows and pigs. This was John Company's final act of criminal stupidity.

It was the Bengal army that mutinied. The majority of the Indians did not join in the battle, but waited with the immemorial patience of the East to accept the yoke of whoever should win. Most of the independent princes remained aloof. Only a few discontented ex-rulers and their heirs and hangers-on threw in their lot with the mutineers.

The Mutiny began at Meerut, and the immediate cause was the

unwise severity of some incompetent officers. The mutineers marched to Delhi which they seized, massacring not only all the British troops but also their women and children.

It was the wanton butchery of women and children, often with embellishments of gross obscenity, which aroused the horror of the whole world and lost the mutineers any sympathy which they might have had in certain quarters.

At Cawnpore and Oudh infamous massacres of women and children were perpetrated, the details of which are still vivid in the annals of horror.

The British rallied quickly and substantially subdued the Mutiny with the army already in India, assisted by faithful Indian troops, before reinforcements arrived from England. The Mutiny was suppressed with great severity, and it was hardly surprising that the mutineers were executed out of hand after what had been done to the English women and children.

One method of execution was that of securing the victims to the mouths of cannon and then blowing them to pieces. In his memoirs one artillery commander said the effect of this was to bring down a rain of blood and pieces of flesh from the sky which ruined the fine uniforms of the watching troops. Whereupon he recommended that the practice be abandoned.

In England the news of the Mutiny was received first with disbelief, then horror, and finally a rage which transcended every other feeling.

One writer to *The Times* said that Delhi should be destroyed completely, and "every Sepoy should be a pauper, his house in flames, himself fleeing from man who hunts him like a wolf". Lord Ellenborough, who had been a Governor-General, went further and declared that every man in Delhi should be castrated and the city renamed Eunuchabad.

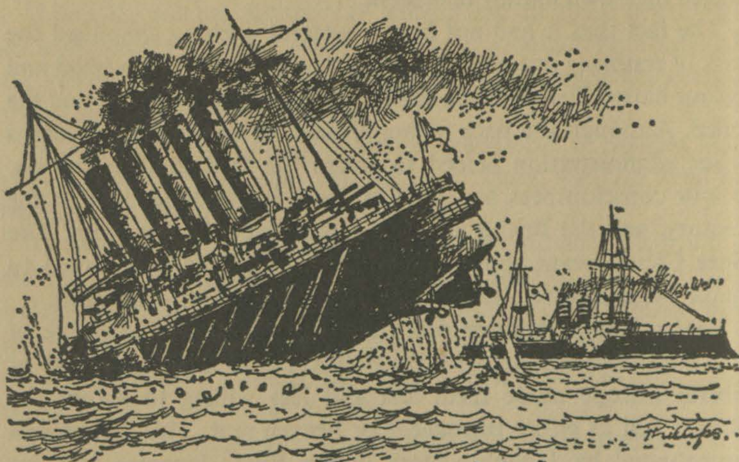
But the rage subsided, and England was roused to a new sense of responsibility for India. An Act was passed abolishing the rule of the Company and transferring the government of India to the Crown. And so in 1858 the British Government replaced John Company in name as it had long done in fact. Benjamin Disraeli, who had long been a bitter opponent of the rule of the Company in India, advised Queen Victoria to assume the title of Empress of India, which she did in 1877.

At the time of its dissolution the Company had its own standing army which included twenty thousand Europeans besides Indian troops. When they were transferred to the Queen's service they staged their own mutiny in protest.

The fact that it had not been a general uprising simplified the task of restoring order in India. But the memory of bloodshed and colour hatred lingered long in the minds of both the rulers and the ruled. Although the pace of westernization was slowed up and a wiser administration helped to soften the feelings of bitterness, colour consciousness hardened in India in the latter half of the century, and the British and the Indians grew farther apart. The Suez Canal meant short sea voyages home, and that served to make English society more exclusive and more self-contained.

Many Indians became educated and travelled. Knowledge of the world and contact with the political and nationalist ideas of liberal Europe made them less and less willing to accept the British Raj as either permanent or heaven-sent. This feeling was accentuated by Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war, an event which affected the thinking of many Asians on the subject of white domination.

The end of the British Raj, which came in 1947, was an inevitable political evolution which would have taken place even if the mistakes of the previous centuries had not been made. But those mistakes – the refusal of successive governments to shoulder responsibility for India, the greed and short-sighted attitudes of the majority of the English who went to India, the blind desire to westernize India – caused much unnecessary suffering and bitterness during the centuries of British rule.



Russia's Blind Eye

When Japan, which barely fifty years previously had been a feudal, backward state, went to war with mighty Russia in 1904, all the civilized world thought she was mad. Russia was the greatest land power on earth, and also had a formidable two-ocean fleet; with a standing peacetime army of a million men every nation treated her with respect.

Little Japan, in trying conclusions with this Euro-Asian colossus, was apparently asking for annihilation. All the cards were stacked against her. Japan's army was some two hundred and seventy thousand strong, and was backed up by less than two hundred thousand ill-trained reservists. Russia had limitless resources of men and material at the other end of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Russia, after a holding operation in which to gather her enormous strength, was expected to drive the insolent Asiatics into the sea, and then dictate to them a crippling peace. No greater mistake was ever made by the world.

Japan's emergence from its two centuries of seclusion is part of

an interesting chapter of Far Eastern history. During the Middle Ages Japan traded with her neighbours in the normal way, and Kublai Khan made two unsuccessful attempts to conquer the country. Later came the European merchant adventurers, followed by the inevitable missionaries, who presently claimed a quarter of a million converts.

In the seventeenth century the Shogun Iyemitsu of the Tokugawa Dynasty persecuted the Christians because he feared that the missionaries were the forerunners of a western attempt to conquer and colonize Japan. All westerners were turned out of the country and Japan was closed to the outside world.

For two centuries Japan lived in a barbaric kind of feudalism from which it was rescued, so to speak, in 1853 by the arrival of an American naval squadron under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry.

Japan was converted, and found that she greatly admired the material progress of the western world. All she had to offer in return was art, and Japanese artists were highly thought of throughout the world.

The Japanese called this momentous time the era of Meiji or enlightenment. Other Japanese termed it "the coming of the barbarians". It was certainly momentous. The Americans arrived with proposals of trade and friendship from their President, and the Japanese rulers decided that the outside world which they had shunned for so long had much in the way of material advantage to offer.

There was some internal opposition at first, but modernization proceeded apace and with a speed and efficiency which astonished the western world. Japan's sudden leap from feudalism to a modern industrial state was one of the most remarkable events which took place in the fifty years up to 1900.

In every way they copied the western world, and particularly in the matter of armaments. A modern army was trained and equipped under French and German instructors, and Japan soon proved her efficiency at war. In 1894 she successfully fought China for the possession of Korea. She then had a small fleet of 28 warships, with a total tonnage of more than fifty thousand. After the Sino-Japanese War she developed her navy further and by 1904 she had 78 warships with a total tonnage of 256,816. Britain,

the world's greatest expert in the art of sea warfare, was her adviser and instructor.

When Russia's Balkan ambitions were repulsed in the Crimean War (1854–6), she expanded in Asia and in the Far East. In Asia she clashed with British interests in the Indian Empire and the adjacent countries. In the Far East she clashed with Japan's ambitions.

At the end of the nineteenth century all the great powers were meddling in China, carving it up in their own selfish interests, a scandalous business which the Asiatics have never forgiven. Japan was just as bad in her aggressive mood of infant nationhood, a mood which lasted until 1945.

In the general share-out of Chinese territory Russia was given the Liaotung Peninsula and the ice-free Port Arthur which Japan had previously seized from China and then been persuaded by the great powers to return to them. This had infuriated Japan.

Russia's Far Eastern pressure was concentrated in Manchuria which she occupied as the result of the international intervention which suppressed the Boxer Rebellion in China. Russia was not expected by the powers to hold Manchuria permanently, but when she extended the Trans-Siberian Railway through Manchuria to Port Arthur, it was obvious that she had every intention of staying there.

These Russian moves were naturally enough regarded with great suspicion by Japan, and to a lesser extent by Great Britain, so the two countries pooled their interests in the shape of a mutual defence treaty which was signed in January 1902. The effect of this treaty was that if Japan was involved in a war with more than one other power, Britain would come to her aid, and vice versa. This left Japan free for warlike adventures without involving Britain.

Again and again Japan protested in St Petersburg (Leningrad) against the consolidation of Russian influence in Manchuria, and in 1903, when Russia showed signs of extending her Manchurian policy into Korea, Japan protested even more vigorously. Russia tried to soothe her by proposing various pacific treaties, but neither power could agree. The negotiations went on for five months. Russia was both unyielding and unconciliatory on a subject which Japan considered affected her vital interests.

Japan finally came to the conclusion that the issue could only be decided by war. But neither the Tsar nor his government wanted war, or believed that the situation would lead to it. They were in fact unprepared for it, not for a moment believing that Japan would dare to challenge the Russian might. Russia stumbled into the war more by presumption than anything else.

She had certainly behaved arrogantly in the Far East, and her actions had more than once affronted Great Britain. But Russia did not think she would have any trouble with Britain, fully occupied with the South African war and its aftermath, much less than with Japan, for whom the Russians had the heartiest contempt.

The war with Russia was popular enough in Japan, which became more confident as the army and navy grew and expanded. With military confidence her voice became stronger and more insistent, her attitude more bellicose.

Russia thought she was bluffing, and if Japan was mad enough to go to war with her could easily counter any military or naval move she might make.

At the beginning of 1904 the military party won the Tsar's ear and Nicholas II felt it his duty to warn Japan of the imprudence of her obstinate attitude. At the New Year's Day reception for the Diplomatic Corps in St Petersburg the Tsar, in his own words, spoke "very earnestly and sternly" to the Japanese minister and told him that Russia was "quite conscious of her strength" and that there was a limit to her patience. When finally in February 1904 the Japanese Ambassador asked for his passport, Nicholas grandly exclaimed: "What insolence!"

The Russians thought that the war would be little more than a punitive expedition. Their military experts believed that Japanese troops would probably be landed in Korea, which they would use as a base for a combined military and naval attack on Port Arthur, Russia's main naval base in Manchuria. They believed that initially Japan would have numerical superiority, though this would soon be overwhelmingly reversed by the massive Russian reinforcements which would pour along the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was expected that the superior Russian naval forces in the Pacific would be able to keep Japan at bay until the reinforcements arrived from Russia.

Each one of these suppositions proved to be wrong, as was also the belief that the war would have the overwhelming support of the Russian civilian population. Another serious mistake the Russians made was to overestimate the efficiency and capability of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Contrary to Russian expectations, the Japanese first blow was a naval one. This was, despite Russian military thinking, the best strategic move, for to transport her armies unhindered Japan must have command of the seas.

As later at Pearl Harbour, Japan struck first and declared war afterwards. Instead of landing troops in northern Korea as the Russians expected, the Japanese struck at Port Arthur, taking by surprise the Russian Pacific Squadron which was crippled by this instantaneous assertion of naval supremacy. Many Russian vessels were sunk, including the flagship *Petropavlovsk*, which went down with the admiral and six hundred men. What remained of the Russian fleet stayed in harbour after that, leaving the Japanese in command of the sea.

Despite this early reverse, the Russians remained completely confident. Overwhelming forces would soon be sent to the Far East and the war brought to a swift conclusion. The impudent Japanese would be taught a severe lesson. The Tsar wrote to his cousin, William II of Germany, saying that the people were stirred by the outbreak of war, which would be a short one. Russia expected an early victory. The Russian commander in the Far East, Admiral Alexeyev, went so far as to say that he feared the Tsar would permit the war to end too quickly and allow the Japanese an easy peace after only a small taste of defeat.

Meanwhile the Japanese First Army poured into Korea. The Russian forces played a waiting game, confidently expecting overwhelming reinforcements to come along the Trans-Siberian Railway. General Alexis Kuropatkin, who commanded the Russian army, declared he would fight no battle until he had superiority in numbers, which did not suggest great confidence in the quality of his soldiers or his own generalship.

However the Japanese First Army forced action upon him at the Battle of Yalu in May 1904, when the Russian army, well out-numbered by the Japanese, was put to flight.

The Battle of Yalu has been termed a moment in world history.

It was Japan's first land battle against a white nation. It was planned with meticulous care and skill, knowing how much depended upon her being able to beat the Russians in their first encounter. Yalu caused a great sensation in Asia. A European army had been beaten by an Asiatic army. The fact that the majority of the Russian forces got away intact, and that they had been greatly outnumbered, did not matter. The momentous fact was that they had been beaten.

These reverses were badly received in Russia where the war was very unpopular. The people, far from being behind the government, were in fact on the verge of revolution. Morale was bad. Although the soldiers in Manchuria fought with the traditional stolid obstinacy of the Russian peasant-warrior, the soldiers who were being mobilized at home were indifferent to the war. Far-off Manchuria did not seem worth fighting for, and the more politically conscious among them were saying that the war was being fought to safeguard the investments of a gang of financial adventurers, some of them Grand Dukes, cousins of the Tsar, who had gambled deeply in the prospective looting of Manchuria and China, and who insisted that their investments must be protected at the cost of Russian lives.

This kind of inflammatory stuff accentuated the political unrest and dissatisfaction at the economic dislocation the war caused. Beneath the surface a dangerous situation was brewing.

Russian disillusion was increased by the failure of the Trans-Siberian Railway to transport sufficient troops to Manchuria in time. This five-thousand-mile railway, though something of a wonder in the days of the Russo-Japanese War when it had only just been completed, was single track for most of the way, and this meant long delays in sidings for trains to pass each other. There were always delays at Lake Baikal which at that time was a complete barrier to the line. Trains were ferried across it during the summer. In the winter lines were laid across the ice.

Between the spring thaw and the winter freeze, when there was no ferry and the ice was not strong enough to bear the trains, there was complete stoppage of traffic. It was calculated that 40,000 troops per month could be transported along the railway during the summer.

The Japanese too had their transport problems, but they

managed to inflict another defeat upon the Russian army at the Battle of Nashan, which took place on 26 May 1904. The Japanese were not really strong enough to take full advantage of their successes. The Russians remained on the defensive all the summer, and suffered yet another defeat at the Battle of Lio-Yang at the end of August. It was a costly victory. Japanese casualties were 23,000 against the Russians' 19,000.

During that summer trainload after trainload of Russian reservists, most of them peasants, were sent along the Siberian railway to die in the distant battlefields of the Far East. These reinforcements swelled the Russian armies until by the autumn they were 300,000 strong, against the Japanese estimated 220,000. In October Kuropatkin launched an offensive at Sha-ho, and after bitter fighting neither side got the advantage.

In July the Japanese laid siege to Port Arthur, and after a long and obstinate battle finally captured the great naval fortress by the end of December at the cost to them of 92,000 casualties.

The last great battle of the war took place in February 1905, during which each side had over three hundred thousand men in the field. The Battle of Mukden was one of the greatest land battles fought before the First World War. The trenches of the opposing forces stretched for forty-seven miles. It was a long and bitter battle, which began with a Japanese attack on the Russian defences of Mukden on 21 February, and ended on 10 March with the Russian army withdrawing in defeat after having lost 97,000 men.

But Russia's most humiliating and overwhelming defeat was at sea. The Russian Baltic Fleet left Libau (now Liepaya, in Latvia) on 15 October 1904 to sail to the Far East to support the hard-pressed Russian squadrons at Port Arthur and Vladivostok.

Their great fear was torpedo boats, and as they steamed down the North Sea they opened fire on British fishing vessels. They must have been in a high state of nervous tension and excitement, for it was difficult to believe that Japanese torpedo boats would be in the North Sea, which was their explanation.

There was naturally enough a great outcry in Britain, and much talk of war. What did the Russians think they were firing at? Why did their guns go off at all? Their enemy was on the other side of the world. The Russians' excuse was the Anglo-Japanese

Alliance of 1902, and doubtless they believed that Britain was actively on Japan's side. There was certainly a lot of sympathy for Japan in England. Several fishermen were killed in this unfortunate incident, on which an international commission was held in 1905. Compensation was paid by the Russian government.

The Russian fleet under Admiral Rozhestvenski, was shadowed by a strong British naval force until it reached the Atlantic. It continued around Africa and put into Madagascar where Rozhestvenski heard that the Japanese had taken Port Arthur, and there was some talk of abandoning the voyage and returning to the Baltic. But when he heard that reinforcements had left the Baltic under Rear-Admiral Nebogatov, and were proceeding through Suez to join him, Rozhestvenski laid plans to take the united fleet to Far Eastern waters to destroy the presumptuous Japanese.

The Russian fleet's stay at Madagascar caused another international row. It was said that it received facilities and hospitality from the French authorities beyond what the rules of international law were generally understood to allow to belligerent ships in neutral ports. The British Foreign Office believed that the action of France might be said by Japan to have gone beyond the limits of neutrality, and that Japan might have appealed to the Anglo-Japanese Treaty and requested Britain to take some counteraction.

Japan however did not invoke the treaty. She did not need any help against Russia, and was well able to deal with her on both land and sea.

Rozhestvenski proceeded northwards and joined Nebogatov's fleet in the South China Sea. The combined fleet was numerous rather than formidable. Its few modern battleships were restricted so far as fleet action was concerned by having to operate side by side with old and ineffectual capital ships. Also the large number of store ships and colliers considerably restricted Rozhestvenski's freedom of movement.

The Japanese fleet under Admiral Togo awaited the Russian armada with some concern. Prudently Togo chose to give battle in home waters. Rozhestvenski sailed from the South China Sea on 14 May 1905 and for two weeks lost himself with his motley armada in the vast Pacific.

To reach Vladivostok Rozhestvenski had either to sail to the

east of Japan and come in through the north of the Nippon Archipelago, or go boldly through the Korea Strait. He chose the latter course and here, by the island of Tsushima, Togo awaited him with the Japanese fleet. The battle took place on 27 and 28 May and the Russian fleet was completely overwhelmed. Tsushima was the greatest naval defeat of all history. The whole of the Russian fleet was either captured or sunk.

The disasters of Mukden and Tsushima brought Russia to the brink of revolution. Major strikes broke out all over the country. The Tsar's uncle and the Minister of the Interior were killed by bombs. A mob marched on the Tsar's Winter Palace at St Petersburg, and were greeted with volleys of gunfire which slaughtered nearly a thousand people and wounded five thousand more. Universities were closed, and after the disaster of Tsushima the seamen of the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied and murdered their officers.

Japan herself, her resources badly strained, was on the point of bankruptcy, and both sides were very willing to accept the mediation of the President of the United States. The peace negotiations were held at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in August 1905. Russia agreed to cede Port Arthur, the southern half of Sakhalin, evacuate Manchuria, and recognize Korea as a Japanese sphere of influence.

The astonishment at Japan's victory was mingled with some doubts, for despite Japan's popularity it was thought in some quarters that Russia had had a raw deal during the nineteenth century. It was necessary for Russia, as a great nation, to have an outlet to a sea which did not freeze in the winter. Access to the Mediterranean through the Dardanelles was barred by belligerent British policy, and the British also warned Russia out of the Persian Gulf. As soon as she acquired ice-free Port Arthur in the Far East Britain made an alliance with Japan, the object of which was to deprive Russia of this port also.

By 1900 Britain had recognized the growing power and ambitions of Japan, and come to terms with them. Russia refused to, even though she had greater interests in the area than Britain. Her underestimation of the ability of Japan to wage war was a blunder of the greatest magnitude.

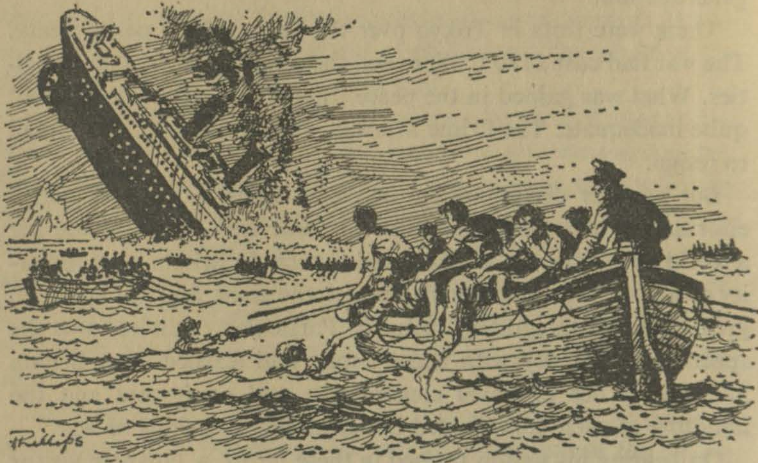
After the war Russia was just as intransigent as she had been before. She knew that Japan had no means of enforcing the peace

terms, exhausted as she was. Russia refused to pay an indemnity, apart from four million pounds for the upkeep of Russian prisoners of war, though this was considered at the time a fairly generous sum.

There were riots in Tokyo over the terms of the peace treaty. The war had cost £170 million, and there had been 230,000 casualties. What was gained in the peace treaty for such a price seemed quite inadequate. The Prime Minister, Prince Katsura, was forced to resign.

But however disappointing the peace terms, Japan had gained enormously in terms of prestige. The war with Russia made her a world power and she was accepted as such. In Britain her popularity soared – the little nation had beaten the giant, and this appealed greatly to British sporting instincts. Particularly admired was the speed and efficiency with which Japan had learned what Britain had taught her of naval construction and equipment and the handling of such complicated things as modern ships of war.

On hearing his nation praised in these terms, a Japanese visitor to London said: "Yes. We used to be a nation of artists. Our art was really good. You called us barbarians then. Now our art is not so good as it was, but we have learned how to kill, and you say we are civilized."



The Unsinkable

Nobody even thought of ships as being unsinkable until the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century even the largest steamships, though considered as safe as man could make them, were never thought to be unsinkable. Events had proved that this was not so. The Victorians had a healthy respect for the powers of nature as well as a recognition of the failings of man.

With the new century came fresh developments in ship-building and a firmer confidence in the genius of man who had created the scientific age, and whose inventions and discoveries could now defy the very elements. Consider the refrigeration ship which could carry the perishable foods of the antipodes across the tropics and deliver them fresh to the markets of Europe. This was one of the most important developments in shipbuilding and one in which Britain was to the forefront in the early days of the century. Another important development was the turbine, which replaced the less efficient reciprocating engine.

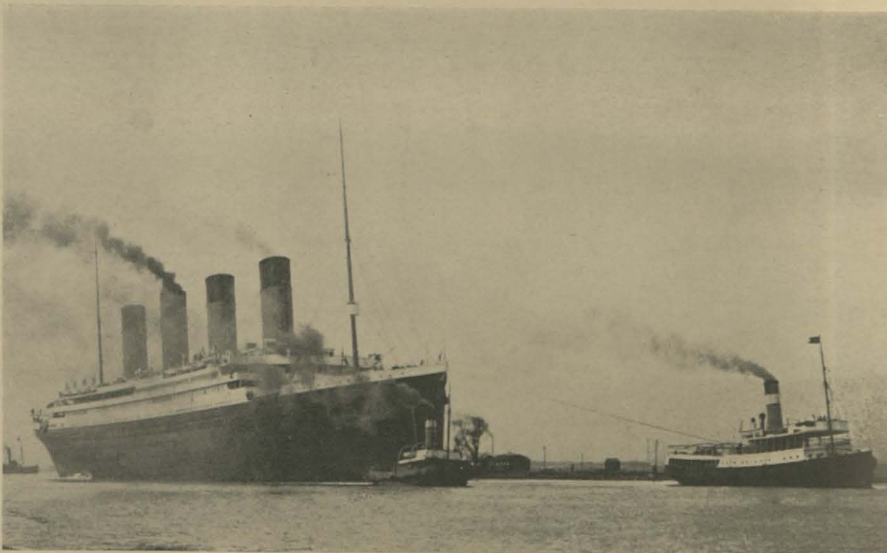
Perhaps the most significant was the advent of the great liners which plied the Atlantic trade. Ocean travellers of the nineteenth

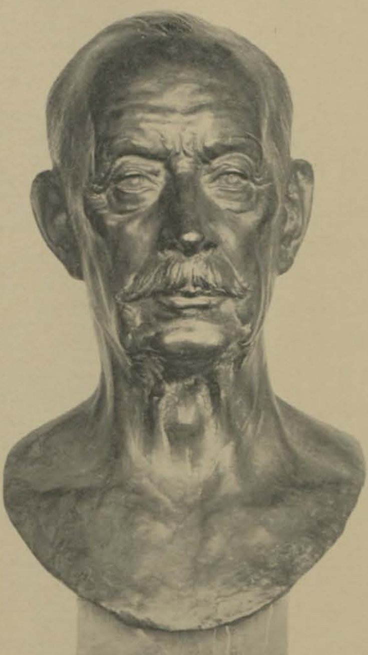




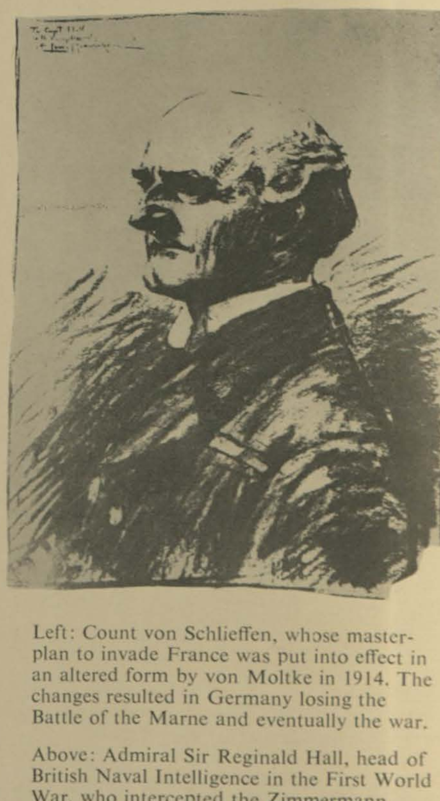
Top. Admiral Togo, the Commander of the Japanese fleet during the Russo-Japanese war, who in the Battle of Tsushima on the night of 27 May 1905 inflicted upon the Russians the greatest naval defeat in history. The Japanese Navy destroyed or captured every single ship of the Russian fleet.

Above: the Black Hole of Calcutta was one of the most famous episodes in the long history of Britain's dealings in India. After the surrender of Fort William in 1756, Suraj-ud-Dowlah threw 146 British captives into a small room. In the morning only twenty-three remained alive.





Top: the *Titanic* leaving to begin her trials. With her system of watertight doors she was reckoned to be unsinkable. But on her maiden voyage to New York in 1912 she struck an iceberg and went down in less than three hours. Over 1,500 passengers and crew lost their lives.



Left: Count von Schlieffen, whose master-plan to invade France was put into effect in an altered form by von Moltke in 1914. The changes resulted in Germany losing the Battle of the Marne and eventually the war.

Above: Admiral Sir Reginald Hall, head of British Naval Intelligence in the First World War, who intercepted the Zimmermann Telegram which resulted in America declaring war on Germany in 1917.

century had to be prepared for certain hardships. The transatlantic passage was for spartans until the plushy ships of the eighteen-sixties and seventies endeavoured to provide a luxury approaching that of the hotels of the period. Even so, these ships often carried sails for use in case the engines broke down, or the fuel ran out while battling with the Atlantic storms.

But they were puny compared with modern liners. Even the *Great Eastern*, which sailed the oceans in the sixties and seventies and was regarded as colossal, was barely 19,000 tons. Liners plying the Atlantic in the seventies and eighties were more in the region of 7,000 or 8,000 tons. In the nineties the largest Cunarder was 13,000 tons. At the turn of the century the White Star Line, Cunard's keenest competitors on the Atlantic, had a 17,000-tonner on the Liverpool to New York run.

The really big ships arrived suddenly in the first decade of the century, when enormous liners of 30,000 tons and more appeared on the Atlantic. Sir Charles Parsons's invention of the steam turbine in 1884 had revolutionized ship propulsion, and gave these big ships a remarkable turn of speed. The most famous of these was the old *Mauretania* (31,500 tons), launched in 1907 and which attained a speed of 30 knots.

These great liners were now floating hotels. You forgot you were at sea, unless the motion was sufficient to remind you otherwise. Both Britain and Germany vied with each other in the building of these big ships, each of which carried thousands of passengers.

In Britain the building of these big ships was made possible by government financial help. The Balfour administration of 1903 granted a loan and an annual subsidy to the Cunard Line. This was done for reasons of national prestige, and to prevent the threatened take-over of Cunard by American financial interests.

For all the splendour and prestige of these great ships, it was their carrying capacity which made them pay. Emigrants were streaming across the Atlantic from Europe to the New World. It was really this exodus from Europe to North America – surely the greatest human migration of all time – which was responsible for the great ships of fifty years ago.

The shipping companies competed in putting bigger and faster vessels on the Atlantic and fortunes were made and lost in carrying this traffic, then at its peak. The glamour was in the

splendour and wealth of the first class passengers and in the magnificent appearance of the great ships, but the hard cash came from the tens of thousands of emigrants seeking a better life in the New World.

These old four-funnelled liners had a classic beauty, like the old sailing ships, and in their day they were among the wonders of the world. Modern shipbuilding had made great strides; hull design improved. Double bottoms, transverse bulkheads, watertight compartments and an all-steel construction gave the necessary strength a big ship required for the strains and stresses which the ocean placed upon it.

By 1912 Britain had three of these giants on the Atlantic – the *Luisitania*, *Mauretania*, and *Olympic*; the *Titanic* joined them in April of that year. They were certainly safer and more comfortable than the liners of the nineties, and many responsible people believed that they were in normal circumstances unsinkable.

"I cannot imagine any condition which would cause the ship to founder. I cannot conceive any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that." These words were spoken by Captain Edward J. Smith who commanded the *Titanic* and who went down with her at twenty minutes past two on the morning of 15 April 1912 together with 1,502 of his passengers and crew. He was not however speaking of the *Titanic*, but of the *Adriatic* (24,000 tons) which he took command of in 1907.

The legend of the *Titanic*'s unsinkability was born in the pages of the *Shipbuilder* which, when discussing the hull design and watertight compartments of the new ship, said that the doors of the watertight compartments could be closed by a switch on the bridge, which would "make the vessel practically unsinkable". The double bottom of the *Titanic* was divided into sixteen watertight compartments by means of watertight bulkheads which ran right across the ship. The ship would remain afloat when any two of these compartments were flooded.

The kind of sea disaster envisaged in those days was collision, and no one believed that the damage from such an accident would flood more than two watertight compartments. The fault of the *Titanic*'s construction was that the watertight compartments did not extend high enough in the ship, and it was that which proved fatal to her when she hit the iceberg.

She was launched at the Belfast shipyard of Harland and Wolff on 31 May 1911 and was completed and ready for service on 1 April 1912. She was 882 feet long and her gross weight was 46,300 tons, with a displacement tonnage of 66,000. Her engines consisted of two sets of four-cylinder reciprocating engines each of which drove a wing propeller, and a turbine which drove the centre propeller. The total engine power produced 55,000 horsepower, and this drove the ship along at a speed of twenty-five knots.

The *Titanic* was an elegant, four-funnel liner, and looked like the *Olympic* (her sister ship), the *Mauretania*, the *Lusitania* (also ill-fated), and other famous greyhounds of the ocean. In appearance these ships have never been surpassed – except possibly by some of the beautiful yacht-like Inman liners of the eighties and nineties – and in their age they had a magic as well as a majesty which is not associated with ships in this modern age. A large liner had to have four funnels. The Atlantic trade demanded it. People had been known to cancel their bookings at the last minute if the ship had not the requisite number of funnels. Three were not enough and five (they tried it) were too many, and a disproportion.

Captain Edward Smith was given command of the *Titanic* in rather controversial circumstances. He was the senior master of the White Star Line, and had been in the company's service for thirty-eight years. In 1911 he had been in command of the *Olympic*, when she was involved in a collision in Cowes Roads with H.M.S. *Hawke*, a cruiser of 7,350 tons. Both ships were damaged, though no one was hurt.

There was a great argument as to who was to blame. The Admiralty Division Court finally found against Captain Smith and in favour of the commander of H.M.S. *Hawke*. The White Star Line never accepted the verdict, which is certainly a controversial one, and to emphasize their confidence in Captain Smith they gave him command of their crack liner, the *Titanic*. In reply the Admiralty expressed their confidence in their own man by promoting him from Commander to Captain.

The *Titanic* sailed on its maiden voyage to New York from Southampton at noon on 10 April 1912. As she left the dock she narrowly escaped collision with the American liner *New York*. This however struck no one as being ominous, and the liner pro-

ceeded down Southampton Water, past the spot where Captain Smith had had the collision with H.M.S. *Hawke*. Captain Smith then set course for Cherbourg, where he arrived that evening to pick up passengers from France. The following day the *Titanic* called at Queenstown where more passengers, many of them Irish immigrants for America, were embarked, and where one of the crew incidentally, and perhaps wisely as it turned out, deserted.

When she left Queenstown at two o'clock in the afternoon of 11 April, the *Titanic* carried 1,316 passengers and 891 crew, a total of 2,207. Of the passengers 292 were first class, and they included many prominent people – Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon, the Countess of Rothes, Colonel and Mrs John Jacob Astor, Bruce Ismay (managing director of the White Star line) and Thomas Andrews (managing director of Harland and Wolff who built the ship). There were besides many people of wealth and fashion, British and American, whose names mean nothing today. It was in fact a very glamorous maiden voyage, though she was not booked to capacity. Its loss resulted in several gaps in the Social Register of the day.

Of the 1,316 passengers there were, apart from the 292 first class passengers, 271 in the second class and 563 in the third class accommodation. The majority of the third class passengers were non-British.

Lifeboat drill was considered unnecessary as the unsinkable *Titanic* sped westwards at twenty-two knots. Actually the number of her lifeboats exceeded the number laid down under the existing safety regulations for British ships. She had sixteen and they could hold a total of 1,178 persons – just over half the number of people on board. White Star considered this a generous allowance, as indeed it was, seeing that the regulations required her to carry lifeboats for only 962 people. The regulations of course were absurd and were quickly altered after the disaster. But in 1912 nobody believed that a ship like the *Titanic* would ever have to use her lifeboats.

By 14 April the *Titanic* was some three hundred miles to the south-south-east of Newfoundland. It was a cold and calm Sunday, and throughout the day the ship had received wireless reports of ice having been encountered by other vessels – the *Caronia*, *Baltic*, the *Amerika* and the *Californian*.

The *Titanic* however had sighted no ice herself, though lookouts were told to keep a very sharp eye for it. The reports from the other vessels suggested that there were icebergs in the track the *Titanic* was taking. But Captain Smith gave no order to slacken speed. He was in fact dubious of the reports of ice so far south at that time of year, and he had sailed the Atlantic for many years. At nightfall the temperature dropped sharply to nearly freezing point. Yet no order was given to slacken speed. The *Titanic* sped on through the darkness. At ten o'clock the sea temperature was thirty-one degrees, a certain indication of the presence of ice. Yet speed was not reduced.

It was a calm, clear, bitingly cold night. Seaman Frederick Fleet shivered in the crows' nest as he peered into the darkness ahead. A few seconds before twenty minutes to midnight he saw something looming ahead – a dark mass with a white fringe discernible at the top, getting larger every moment as the ship drew nearer. He gave the alarm signal to the bridge and lifted the phone.

"Iceberg right ahead," he called.

On the bridge First Officer Murdoch saw the iceberg straight ahead as the *Titanic* sped towards it, a glistening white shape in the reflected lights of the great ship. Its height was estimated at about ninety feet. He immediately ordered "Hard-a-starboard", put the engine room telegraph to "Stop" and then "Full astern".

As the bow of the *Titanic* swung away, the iceberg, towering wet and glistening above the decks, hit the ship a glancing blow, scraping down her side. Most of those on board felt little more than a slight jar. Some felt nothing at all.

On the bridge Murdoch pushed the button closing the water-tight doors and sent the Fourth Officer on a tour of inspection. The *Titanic* was now hove-to, and began to blow off steam.

The noise of the impact had brought Captain Smith rushing up from his cabin next to the wheelhouse on to the bridge. He could see no sign of the iceberg, and at first it seemed to him that the *Titanic* had had a lucky escape. Then Carpenter Hutchinson came rushing up to the bridge with the news that the ship was making water fast.

Below, in the foremost boiler room, the firemen had felt the full force of the crash and were being overwhelmed by the inrushing sea. They worked frantically to shut the dampers and draw the fires in order to release the steam pressure.

The passengers were unaware of any danger. Above the waterline the impact had been so slight that many took no notice, and continued their bridge and poker games. Many others slept undisturbed in their bunks.

Meanwhile, on the bridge, the Captain and his officers had been joined by Bruce Ismay, chairman of the line, who wanted to know what was going on. Captain Smith told him that the *Titanic* had been seriously damaged by the collision with the iceberg and that he was waiting for Thomas Andrews, managing director of the ship's builders, with whom he intended to make an assessment of the situation.

Andrews and the Captain made their inspection and returned to the bridge with grave news. The iceberg had sliced a gash 300 feet long in the *Titanic*'s starboard bow and water was entering the five foremost forward compartments. When these were filled, Andrews said, the ship would be down by the bows, and as the watertight compartments went only as high as E-deck water would flood into the rest of the ship and she would sink. It was inevitable, said Andrews. There was no hope. The *Titanic* would go down.

Captain Smith found the truth difficult to face. This was an unsinkable ship and now the man who had built it said that it would not float.

At five minutes past midnight, twenty-five minutes after hitting the iceberg, Captain Smith ordered his officers to uncover the lifeboats. Then he went into the wireless room and ordered the operator, John Phillips, to send out a call for assistance, and give the ship's position.

The distress call from the *Titanic* was heard far and wide by operators in other ships who could hardly believe their ears. The *Mount Temple*, the *Virginian*, the *Frankfort*, the *Burma*, and the *Titanic*'s sister ship the *Olympic* all answered, but they were all hundreds of miles distant. Finally at twenty-five minutes past midnight the *Carpathia*, outward bound from New York to the Mediterranean ports, gave her position as only fifty-eight miles away, and said she was coming at full speed to the *Titanic*'s aid.

"Come quickly, old man," begged the *Titanic*'s operator. "We're sinking."

The *Carpathia* said they would cram on every pound of steam, but it would take them four hours to get to the *Titanic*'s position.

The strangest thing about this most tragic of sea disasters was the fact that there was a ship a mere ten miles away, within actual sight of the *Titanic*. This was believed to be the 6,000 ton Leyland liner, *Californian*, bound from London to Boston, which had hove to because of ice. This ship could have been on the scene of the disaster within an hour.

Earlier in the day the *Californian*'s wireless operator had passed on a number of ice warnings to the *Titanic*. These had been rather impatiently received by the *Titanic*. Ice was not considered a very serious danger in those days, for some reason. More important in the *Titanic*'s view were the continuous personal and business radio messages being transmitted by its distinguished passengers via Cape Race to the outside world. The *Californian* and other vessels, working on the same wavelength, had to keep down their ice warnings and other essential messages to a respectful minimum. There were important people on the Atlantic that night, and their frivolous messages on the wireless waves – radio was a new wonder in 1912 – had to be given priority.

At nightfall Captain Lord of the *Californian* prudently stopped engines and lay hove-to because of the ice danger. He went to bed. The watch on the bridge kept a sharp lookout for icebergs, and the radio officer went off duty. In the early days of radio it was not considered necessary to keep a twenty-four hours listening watch. The *Californian* carried only one radio operator who was not at his set at midnight.

So the *Californian* did not hear the *Titanic*'s desperate calls for aid. Before this, in fact, the officer of the watch had seen a strange ship coming up from the east. He informed Captain Lord, who told him to contact the stranger by Morse lamp, but these attempts met with no success. It seemed to the officer of the watch that the stranger suddenly stopped and put out most of her lights. But what might have happened was that the *Titanic* – if it was the *Titanic*, for this is disputed by the officers of the *Californian* – had turned sharply to port after striking the iceberg and was no longer seen broadside.

For an hour the officer on the *Californian*'s bridge watched the stranger ten miles away through his night glasses. She did not move. Morse signals to the *Californian* could not be made out, and the *Californian*'s Morse signals were not answered.

At a quarter to one, with his ship well down by the bows, Captain Smith gave orders to put the women and children in the lifeboats and lower them away. He was painfully aware of the fact that there was room in the boats for only half of his ship's company, and that even if rescue was relatively close at hand, very few would live long in that icy sea (31° F.) even though supported by lifejackets. He had no doubt of the magnitude of the approaching disaster. Neither had Andrews, who died with the ship he had built, nor Bruce Ismay, who was saved but never recovered from the shock.

From the bridge of the *Titanic* they could see the riding lights of the strange ship ten miles away. Below them on the decks of the great liner there were cries and shouts and screams as the hundreds of bewildered passengers milled around while the ship's officers tried to herd them into the boats. Amid the confusion the band played bravely, and the lights were as bright as ever, for heroes in the bowels of the doomed liner were working to keep the lighting plant going until the very last minute.

Captain Smith ordered rockets to be fired to attract the attention of the mysterious ship on the horizon which seemed strangely indifferent to their fate. These rockets were seen on the bridge of the *Californian*, and reported to Captain Lord, who did not consider that the firing of the rockets, which continued every five minutes until the *Titanic* sank, required any action on his part.

The *Californian*'s apparent failure to investigate the plight of the *Titanic* was condemned at the various inquiries into the disaster. Captain Lord's refusal to take any action about the rockets on that fatal night haunted him for the rest of his life. But for his inexplicable mistake, it was said, many more lives would have been saved. Right up until his death in 1962 Lord maintained that he had been wrongly judged, for he was not as close to the *Titanic* as was alleged. He endeavoured in vain to get the condemnation of him reversed.

Much has been written about the class-consciousness which was exercised in filling the lifeboats of the *Titanic*. In those days the classes on board ship were kept rigidly apart, and it seemed natural to the officers and crew that the first class should be given preference in going into the lifeboats. No one at the time thought it wrong that whereas 139 out of the 143 women in the first class were

saved, the number of third class women passengers saved was only 81 out of 179.

The White Star denied that any class distinction was exercised in filling the boats, and the investigators agreed with them. But the figures tell their tale. Very few third class passengers even got into the lifeboats, and no one at the time thought this was strange. Hard-working Irish immigrants were considered more expendable than people of wealth and influence.

It took a long time to fill the boats. Many would not go and refused to believe that the *Titanic* would sink. Women refused to be parted from their husbands. Naturally enough there was a certain amount of panic, and there were stories of men disguising themselves as women in order to get into the lifeboats.

At five minutes past two the last boat was away. There were only 651 people in the boats which had a total capacity of 1,178. They rowed clumsily into the darkness, leaving more than 1,500 people on board. The *Titanic*, with lights still blazing, was now sinking slowly by the bows.

The wireless operator continued sending S.O.S. signals until the power failed. He was in touch with the *Carpathia* throughout; she was racing northwards to the scene and he was begging them to hurry. At 2.10 he sent his last signal and Captain Smith gave the order: "Abandon ship. Every man for himself."

Down below the devoted crew kept the lights going until the rising water forced them up on deck. The conduct of the crew was beyond praise, and in many cases amounted to sheer heroism. The conduct of men like Second Officer Lightoller, whose story is well known and who survived and had a distinguished career at sea, was a credit to the traditions of the maritime service.

The *Titanic* now began to take her death plunge. Down went the bows and up went the stern. The watchers in the boats saw those on board clinging like flies to the tilting decks, then being thrown into tumbled masses among the deck fittings as the stern of the *Titanic* went up. Then everything inside the ship – machinery, furniture, cargo, fuel, everything movable – broke loose. This sound grew into a steady roar which thundered and echoed across the sea in an unearthly din. The massive boilers left their beds and went thundering down with a hollow rumbling roar through the bulkheads, carrying everything with them that stood in their

way. As everything crashed towards the bows of the ship she became vertical in the water, her bows split open, spewing her vitals into the sea. The noise stopped and she settled back a little at the stern and then dived swiftly down and disappeared.

The noise that followed was worse than any noise heard that night – the screams and cries for help as the survivors struggled in the icy water. Many brave attempts were made at rescue. Captain Smith, it was said, was seen with a child in his arms, but he was not among the survivors. Tragically, it could not be said of all the passengers that their behaviour was commendable, some of those in the half-filled lifeboats refused to go back after the *Titanic* had sunk and pick up survivors for fear there might be too many and the boats would be swamped.

The time was 2.20. On the *Californian* the officer of the watch reported to Captain Lord that the strange ship after firing eight rockets had disappeared to the south-west. Captain Lord turned over and went to sleep.

By 3.30 the *Carpathia* had arrived on the scene, and began picking up the survivors in the dawn light. She rescued 705 – 651 from the boats and a mere 54 out of the 1,556 who had been left on the *Titanic* when she went down. The last boatload was picked up at half-past eight. By this time the *Californian* had heard the shattering news on the radio and had joined in the search. Finally both ships set sail for New York.

The *Titanic* disaster burst upon a startled world like a bombshell. When her first S.O.S. messages were received, the crews of some ships on the Atlantic thought it was a joke. The wireless operator on the Allan liner *Virginian* was ridiculed when he gave the message to the officer of the watch. No one could believe that the unsinkable *Titanic* was going down. When the final truth was known the world was flabbergasted. "That so vast and splendid a liner should be sunk verged on the incredible," wrote the leader-writer of the *Daily Mail* on 16 April 1912.

Even before the official inquiry public and newspapers got to work on some who survived the disaster. Male passengers in the lifeboats were accused of cowardice when so many women perished.

Most execrated was Bruce Ismay, chairman of White Star, who was accused by the American Press of interfering in the running

and navigation of the ship and of wanting the *Titanic* to break the Atlantic record – when it should have been steaming cautiously through the ice-strewn sea. They accused him of jumping into the first lifeboat, and even said that he dressed up in women's clothes to disguise himself. Although there was no truth in these allegations, Ismay's life was ruined by the *Titanic* disaster. He resigned from White Star and lived in retirement in Ireland, always under the shadow of the *Titanic*, until his death in 1937.

The British official inquiry into the disaster exonerated Bruce Ismay of any blame, but convicted the master of the *Californian* of negligence in not going to the assistance of the *Titanic* when she saw her distress rockets. "Had she done so," said the report, "she might have saved many if not all of the lives that were lost."

This utterly ruined the career and reputation of Captain Stanley Lord, who lived on, a disgraced man until his death at the age of eighty-four in 1962. In justice to his memory and to other members of the *Californian*'s company, it should be said that many people think that both Captain Lord and the *Californian* were unjustly convicted. The Mercantile Marine Service Association believe that Captain Lord was the "victim of the grossest miscarriage of justice in the history of marine inquiries".

The *Californian*'s case is that their ship was much farther away from the Titanic than was believed – more like twenty-five miles. And to prove this they say that the following morning it took them two and a half hours steaming to reach the scene of the disaster.

The vessel which had been seen from the bridge of the *Californian* was a small ship, and not a large passenger liner. The *Californian*'s defenders claim that the real villain that night was a Norwegian sealer, the *Samson*, which was illegally hunting seals among the ice floes, and when it saw the signals and rockets of the *Titanic* close by, beat a hasty retreat into the darkness, imagining she was being chased by American patrol ships. The *Samson* itself was wrecked in 1952.

Whether or not we have heard the last of the mystery of this greatest of sea disasters it taught the world a terrible lesson. No ship has ever been called "unsinkable" since the *Titanic*. Man quickly abandoned his presumption that he had conquered the forces of nature. The International Ice Patrol was established. The coastguard cutters keep the shipping lanes clear of drifting bergs.

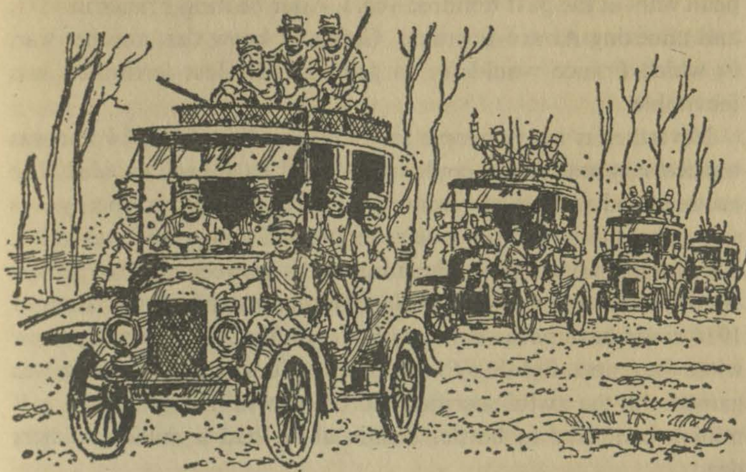
The steamer lanes were shifted farther south for the winter service. Every ship thenceforth kept a twenty-four hours radio watch. The rules about the number of lifeboats to be carried were drastically overhauled, and never again was there to be class distinction in the filling of them.

The chastened White Star Company gave the *Titanic*'s sister ship *Olympic* a drastic refit and built the watertight compartments much higher in the hull. This was said to have made her the safest ship afloat, though no one referred to her unsinkability. She remained in service until 1935, and was broken up for scrap in 1937.

The commission of inquiry into the disaster of 1912 found that the magnitude of the disaster numbed the officers' power of organization. There had been ample time to make rafts, and if this had been done and the boats filled to their proper capacity the loss of life would have been much less.

It is easy to say things like this afterwards. Lightoller, one of the heroes of that night, and who later distinguished himself by taking his own boat over to Dunkirk in 1940, believed that the neglected ice reports which came over the radio was the main cause of the loss of so many lives.

"The disaster was due to a combination of circumstances that never occurred before and can never happen again," he said. "Everything was against us – everything."



Moltke's mistakes in 1914

Most battles – and many wars – have been won or lost as a consequence of someone making a mistake. It might be a tactical misunderstanding, like the wrong order which sent the Light Brigade to its doom at Balaclava, or a major strategic blunder such as that made by King Philip II of Spain when he despatched the Armada to invade England. The course of the two World Wars of the twentieth century was affected by the many mistakes which were made by generals and politicians of both sides. The landing on Gallipoli in 1915 was an outstanding example of a politico-military mistake which cost many lives.

It is impossible to wage a war without making mistakes, as no one can know or accurately deduce all the facts which are known only to the enemy. In the two World Wars both sides made many mistakes, but Germany made the cardinal ones which resulted in her final defeat each time. Hitler's invasion of Russia is discussed in *Barbarossa*, page 176. In 1914 Germany tried to do in France that which she succeeded in doing in 1940, and there is a good argument for saying that she would have succeeded in 1914 but for the

mistakes of her Chief of General Staff, General von Moltke.

Germany's wish to dominate, rather than to live peacefully with her neighbours, has been said to be the cause of three European wars in the past hundred years. After beating France in 1871, and annexing Alsace-Lorraine, Germany knew that another war, in which France would try to get back her lost territories, was inevitable.

Nevertheless many people today believe that the 1914 war was unnecessary and that it could and should have been avoided. The accumulated wealth of a century of progress and prosperity was squandered in it, and a whole generation of young men was killed. The war had no recognizable cause. It was between civilized powers (as opposed to the nature of Nazi Germany) and all the issues of 1914 could have been settled without conflict. No one really knew what they were fighting for, and when it was over nothing was gained. All the awful sacrifice had been in vain. Eight and a half million men died in battle. Britain alone had a million soldiers dead.

Some modern historians however take the view that the 1914 war was inevitable in the context of the times, and was due to nationalistic strivings, economic rivalries, and growing armaments, and not to any particular war guilt on the part of Germany. "There were other deeper forces, moving to broader rhythms that made it very probable that the antique frame of the old Europe would explode," writes Corelli Barnett,* adding that the international problems of 1914 were "insoluble in a world of sovereign powers except by war". In this view Germany was right to prepare for conflict. And preparation was made with a thoroughness which is recognized as part of the Teutonic character.

Germany faced two important problems. Firstly the fact that the combined armies of Germany and their ally Austria were inferior in numbers to those of France and France's ally, Russia – not to include Britain, which was not bound to come to the aid of France, despite the *Entente Cordiale*. The second problem was the fact that the French-German frontier was narrow, a mere 150 miles, and was made well-nigh impregnable by military as well as natural defences. A system of formidable fortresses was based on Epinal, Toul and Verdun.

*In *The Swordbearers* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963).

The man who applied his lively brain to solving this military problem was Count Alfred von Schlieffen, who was Chief of the German General Staff from 1891 to 1906. He spent ten years evolving the plan which bears his name.

Schlieffen knew that in the event of war Russian mobilization would take time, and when the Russian army was at full strength it would require the main German army to deal with it. A swift blow at Russia before she was ready would, after the experience of Napoleon, be military inadvisable owing to the great distances involved. But a swift blow at France was a practical proposition from the military point of view.

The Schlieffen Plan envisaged a bold thrust into northern France by three-quarters of the German army, which would outflank and annihilate the French. It was assumed by Schlieffen that the French armies would be on their fortified positions near the Franco-German border. His plan therefore was to make a powerful thrust through Belgium and Holland, and into France where the frontier at that point was virtually unfortified. The thrust would be made on a broad front stretching from Thionville through Amiens to Abbeville, at which point it would wheel round, pivoting on Thionville, and move across northern France in an arc to take Paris in the rear from the west.

The mass of the German forces were to be concentrated on the extreme right wing of this arc. They would sweep round to the south of Paris, and then turn east to engage the French army in a battle of annihilation in their rear.

Schlieffen allowed fifty-three German divisions for his plan to crush the French, leaving ten divisions to engage the Russians defensively until France was defeated, after which the main Germany army would be free for the eastern front. Schlieffen had not left Britain out of his calculations and had forecast that an expeditionary force of about 100,000 British troops would be operating with the French. He said that the battle could only be won if the Germans had a strong right wing, which would advance from Brussels to Abbeville, then sweep round to the west and south of Paris "pursuing the enemy relentlessly, forcing him to retreat again and again".

Schlieffen's life was spent perfecting his plan, which was put before the General Staff in 1905, at a time when Russia had been

weakened by the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution. It was the product of a keen but narrow military mind. It had weaknesses, and there were some important things he did not take into consideration, such as the French railway system, with the important bearing this would have on supplies in view of the extended lines of communication. Schlieffen, a nineteenth-century soldier, thought in terms of marching armies and mule-carried supply lines.

There was also the question of the by-passing of Paris and the exposure of his flank to the Paris defence garrison as he turned east to engage the rear of the French armies. He was conscious of this last point as being a weakness of his plan. It was really a question of whether Germany could put sufficient troops in the field to engage all the French forces.

Schlieffen died in 1913, and it is quite possible that, had he lived and been able to put his plan into full operation in 1914, France would have been defeated in the autumn of that year. The subsequent history of Europe would have been a very different one, and possibly a happier one, for Hitler owed his access to power solely to the German defeat of 1918. Britain and Germany had no deep-seated quarrel in 1914. Indeed they had much in common and would not have had great difficulty in making peace with each other.

But, unhappily for Germany, if not for Europe, Schlieffen did not live to see the 1914 war. His last words, it is said, were: "It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong."

His successor as Chief of General Staff was Colonel-General Helmuth Johannes Ludwig von Moltke, nephew of the famous Field Marshal Count von Moltke, who was reckoned to be the greatest military strategist of the nineteenth century. Count von Moltke was mainly responsible for the Prussian victories over Austria in 1866 and France in 1870–1.

General Moltke was no military genius like his uncle, or his predecessor Schlieffen. He had in fact few of the characteristics necessary for a good general. He was too intelligent to have overwhelming confidence in himself or in what he was doing. He was something of an intellectual, had read widely, was steeped in the then fashionable philosophy of Neitzsche, a lover of Bach and Mendelssohn, a religious sceptic who believed in nothing. He

was quite untypical of the ordinary Prussian officer. His brothers in arms found him a little too cultured and clever for their earthy, soldiers' minds.

His great drawback as Chief of Staff was his vacillation. He was an opportunist who had difficulty in making decisions. Moltke had a first-class brain, but it was not a military one: really intelligent men are not attracted to the military life and are not suited for it. The great minds of history who have applied themselves to military problems have been rulers like Alexander the Great and Napoleon. It is easier of course to be a successful general than a successful ruler.

Moltke was sixty-six when he became Chief of General Staff. He was in failing health and suffered from heart trouble. He had been in the army since 1870, but had never seen action. Most of his military life had been spent at the Kaiser's Court. As a courtier-soldier, nephew of the great Field Marshal, his appointment to supreme command was inevitable. Birth and social position were more important recommendations than merit and suitability in 1914, at which time there were few, if any, military leaders who had got their positions through personal merit. This system of caste and nepotism, on which the old order of things in Europe was founded, was largely destroyed by the First World War.

Schlieffen bequeathed his famous plan to his successor, and in the summer of 1914 Moltke planned to put it into effect, even though he had certain misgivings about it. Schlieffen had been one of the few people who grasped the truth of the military balance of power in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Allies and the Central Powers had equal forces militarily and industrially. War between them could only mean a stalemate which would exhaust, if not ruin, both sides. A decision in favour of Germany was only possible if a hard blow was struck before her enemies could mobilize. This was the essence of the Schlieffen Plan. Moltke's use – or misuse – of the plan failed. Thereafter the two sides were deadlocked – as Schlieffen foretold they would be – until America entered the war and tipped the balance against Germany.

When Germany declared war on France on 3 August 1914 Moltke was committed to the Schlieffen Plan and the army was deployed in order to put it into effect. Moltke had his reservations

about the plan, and was prepared to modify it. This, in a first-class general, could have put the German army to great advantage; but Moltke was not a first-class general and his reservations led to fatal indecisions and hasty changes of plan.

The great Schlieffen deployment was begun on 2 August by seven armies totalling over 1,500,000 men, commanded respectively by von Kluck, von Bülow, Baron von Hausen, the Duke of Württemberg, the Crown Prince of Bavaria and von Heeringen. None of these princely soldiers had ever been in command of anything larger than a regiment before. All military thinking of both sides in 1914 was rooted firmly in the past. Generals thought in terms of the Boer War, Sedan, the Crimea and in some cases Waterloo. Unlike the Wehrmacht of 1940, the German army of 1914 which marched into Belgium on 4 August was practically unblooded.

Compared with the French, the German army, for all its inexperience in battle, was better trained and equipped, and their field tactics were superior. The five French armies who were in the field in August totalled just over 1,000,000 men. The Belgium army was 117,000 strong and the British Expeditionary Force of 100,000, which was in France by mid-August, was perhaps the best army in the field in 1914, having had practical experience in the Boer War, though it was not a large enough force to affect the issue.

Schlieffen in his plan had not proposed to respect the neutrality of either Belgium or Holland, but in 1914 it was considered of some political importance to have Holland neutral. That country was therefore spared invasion.

The Schlieffen Plan was completely unknown to the French High Command, and when the Germans invaded Belgium on a broad front, the French believed that this was a diversion to camouflage their main attack which was bound to come through the Ardennes. General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, a ruthless, self-confident and assured general, laid his plans accordingly and massed his armies far to the south of where, unknown to him, the main German army was sweeping through Belgium to wheel south on to Paris. The wideness of the German sweep through Belgium, and its strength, were not realized until almost too late.

Moltke was therefore at a great advantage. The attacker always is. He can decide his objectives in advance. The defender

has to lay his plans quickly to meet the developing situation, and initiate counter-attacks skilfully in order to divert the enemy from his objective and bring him to battle in circumstances most favourable to the defence. This Joffre was able to do only to a limited extent for the reason that his military intelligence was not good. For instance, French intelligence told him that Moltke had only 68 divisions in the field; the rest, it was assumed, were on the eastern front. Actually there were 83 German divisions confronting the French armies.

Aeroplanes had been in effective use for several years, but so out-of-date was the military mind of 1914 that neither side used air reconnaissance to any effect during that vital August when the war was virtually lost by Germany in those vast troops manoeuvres in north-eastern France. Aeroplanes could have safely flown over the battlefields – there were no anti-aircraft guns – and formed an accurate picture of what was going on. If any one of the commanders-in-chief had thought of that in August 1914, he would have won the war, for attrition and stalemate was reached mainly because neither side knew what the other was doing. But aeroplanes had not been part of the formal military training of Moltke, then at his headquarters in Coblenz, far from the scene of action, and he would not have known how to use them or evaluate their information. The B.E.F. did have four squadrons, each of twelve military aircraft, in France in August 1914, but their value was not realized. The French, whose soldiers were still clad in the conspicuous red and blue uniforms of 1870, were equally slow to grasp the importance of air reconnaissance.

The Germans had a preponderance of power, a war plan which neither the British or the French understood, and were equipped with more modern weapons which gave them superior fire power. Moltke in fact in those early days had victory in his grasp.

The First and Second German armies swept through Belgium, taking Brussels on 20 August, but though they overcame the heroic resistance of the Belgian army, they failed to destroy it. Meanwhile the French had opened an offensive in Lorraine with nineteen divisions, which came to a disastrous end at the Battle of Morhange-Sarrebourg.

The French attack in Lorraine caused Moltke to pause. He diverted six divisions and reinforced his left to drive back the

French. What he should have done, following the Schlieffen doctrine, was to have strengthened the force of his right wing, which, wheeling round with the momentum of the planned advance, would have enticed the French into a trap by means of a giant pincer movement. Instead the Germans drove the French back to more strongly fortified positions from which they were able to fight the decisive Battle of the Marne.

Before this however the vacillating Moltke had reverted to the Schlieffen Plan of the massive "swing door" across France. But the princely commanders under him ignored his orders, and instead of drawing back in order to lure the French into the intended trap, they made a series of impulsive frontal attacks which drove the French back. Both the German Crown Prince and the Crown Prince of Bavaria were later accused of disregarding superior authority and were held to bear some responsibility for Germany's military failure in 1914. Moltke of course, with his fatal hesitations, was apportioned the main blame.

If a Schlieffen or a Ludendorff had been in command, the French Lorraine offensive would not have made the German army pause in its massive advance, and there would have been no Battle of the Marne to save France from defeat.

Nevertheless, during those last two weeks in August the German advance seemed irresistible, and only the most perceptive were aware that great mistakes were being made which were going to cost Germany the war. Joffre realized at last the strength and power of the German sweep through Belgium; that his left flank was now in grave danger, and that Paris itself was threatened. Joffre attacked the advancing Germans in the Ardennes, and again his armies were thrown back. At Mons the British Expeditionary Force were obliged to retreat, despite their deadly rifle tactics which they had developed during the South African War.

All across France the French and the small British army were retreating before the German flood. In the German headquarters there was the smell of victory in the air. So confident were they that by the end of August divisions were already being transferred from the west to the east, where the Russians were invading East Prussia.

In France, instead of making the "swing door" sweep around Paris in the arc pivoted on the left wing at Thionville, Moltke ordered a general advance, his object being to hit the retreating

enemy with everything he had. Thus the Schlieffen Plan was considerably modified, if not abandoned. Moltke had already weakened the power of his right wing by detaching seven divisions to Maubeuge and Antwerp and four divisions to check the Russian advance in East Prussia.

The reason given afterwards for weakening the right wing in violation of the Schlieffen principle was that victory had already been won. Furthermore, as his forces advanced into France, Moltke lost touch with them, even though his own headquarters were moved forward from Coblenz to Luxembourg.

The German right wing now began to wheel in front of Paris instead of behind it. Kluck and Bülow, who commanded the First and Second Armies respectively, believed that they could annihilate the B.E.F. and roll up the French left by this manoeuvre. Instead, the wheeling German line, passing in front of Paris, exposed its flank to the French Sixth Army under General Maunoury which was defending Paris. Thus by sacrificing the wide advantages inherent in the Schlieffen sweep behind Paris, Moltke exposed the German forces to a counterstroke which snatched from them the quick victory which seemed almost in their grasp.

An important factor in the situation was the fact that the Germans had advanced so rapidly that their supply lines failed to keep up with them, and the troops themselves were exhausted with continuous marching.

From these slightly confused manoeuvrings to the east of Paris evolved the Battle of the Marne, which was fought between 6 and 9 of September, and which not only sealed the fate of Moltke and the Schlieffen Plan, but was the turning point of the war and the first allied victory.

The five German armies now thrusting between Verdun and Paris had placed themselves in a position exposed to envelopment on both flanks. Maunoury's Sixth Army advanced from its positions before Paris, assisted by 600 Paris taxi-cab drivers who drove some 3,000 soldiers to the battle in a shuttle service. Kluck drew back and reformed under Maunoury's attack. This made a gap between his First Army and Bülow's Second now coming under attack from the French Fifth Army.

The surprise of the Germans at this sudden attack on them when they believed the French and British forces to be in full retreat,

was expressed by General von Kuhl, Kluck's Chief of Staff. "Neither the Supreme Command, nor Army Headquarters had the remotest idea of an immediately imminent offensive by the whole French army," he wrote later. "The continuation of the French retreat was taken as settled. There was only a question of our flank being threatened from Paris. The great offensive on the whole front came as a complete surprise. No sign, no prisoner's statement, no newspaper tittle-tattle, had given warning of it."

The gap between the German First and Second Armies was facing the front held by the B.E.F. who were in retreat, and continued to retreat in error. Joffre later bitterly criticized the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, for this. Even on 5 September, when the French were turning about to the attack, the B.E.F. continued retreating for a further day's march to the south. When the British retraced their steps, they found in front of them a thirty-mile gap between the two German armies held only by a light screen of cavalry. As the B.E.F. advanced into this gap, Bülow ordered his Second Army to retreat. Kluck, who had gained a temporary advantage over Maunoury's Sixth Army, was then forced to fall back. By 11 September the German retreat was general. Their armies fell back to the Aisne where they re-formed and stood firm.

But the great opportunity was lost. It did not come again. In departing so far from Schlieffen's Plan, Moltke exposed himself to bitter recrimination. He was charged with causing the German defeat at the Battle of the Marne. In November his health broke up and he was relieved of his command. He died in June 1916.

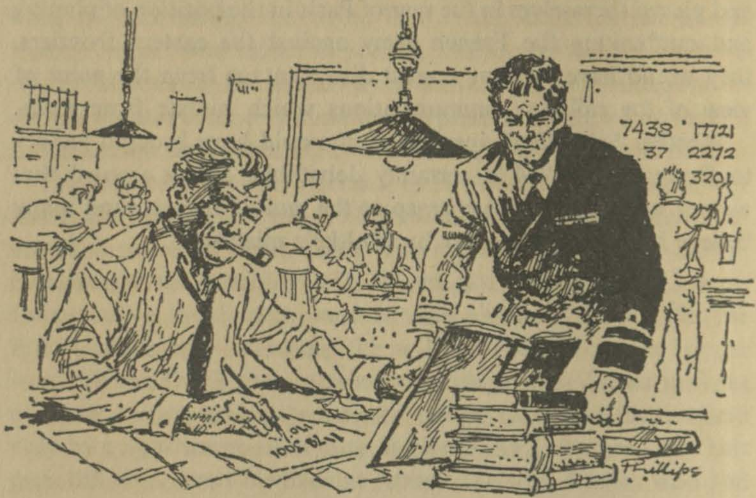
Moltke was not unjustly blamed. He was not the man to command armies. He was unable to control his generals or to make firm decisions. He was a sick man, tired, with no faith in himself, or the grand strategic plan he had inherited. Here lay the true cause of Germany's military failure in 1914, for as Liddell Hart said, "battles are won in the minds of the opposing commanders, not in the bodies of their men".*

Whether Germany would have won the quick victory she sought if the Schlieffen Plan had been faithfully followed is one of history's tantalising unanswered questions. The Schlieffen Plan had its flaws. Schlieffen himself doubted whether Germany had the forces

**History of the World War, 1914-1918* by Liddell Hart (Faber & Faber, 1930).

to accomplish his grand design. Perhaps its great fault lay in the problem of communications. Schlieffen never mentioned the French railways. If the German army had accomplished his plan and placed themselves in the rear of Paris in the position of pinning and outflanking the French army against the eastern frontiers, they would have been at a great disadvantage from the point of view of the railway communications which radiate from Paris.

Whether Schlieffen's inspired plan would have brought victory to Germany in 1914 is certainly debatable. But it seemed that victory was almost in her grasp at the end of August, and many believe it was thrown away by Moltke's mistakes.



The Zimmermann Telegram

Having lost the war of movement by Moltke's errors in 1914, Germany finally lost the war of attrition which followed by Zimmermann's historic blunder in 1917.

By the spring of that year both sides were exhausted. All enthusiasm for the war was gone. Casualties were staggering – Britain had lost more men than were actually fighting in 1917. The French armies were dispirited and on the point of mutiny. After years of demoralizing trench warfare nothing had been gained, and soldiers' lives had been squandered like water. This appalling disregard for human life on the part of the High Commands made the soldiers prize self-preservation higher than victory, and was a breeding ground for mutiny.

The Germans were no better off, even though in 1917 Lloyd George said that they looked as though they were winning the war. But the British blockade had reduced them to starvation rations, and their losses had been so high that they were conscripting fifteen-year-olds for the army, and the country was seething with discontent. Austria was on the point of collapse.

Britain, though at the end of her financial resources and on the point of bankruptcy, flatly rejected the offers of a negotiated peace which Germany was making, and was banking on America coming in on the side of the Allies.

The ghost of Schlieffen still brooded over the war which he had spent his life planning and dreaming about. Schlieffen knew that unless Germany knocked out France in the first month of the war neither side could win, for their military power and resources were equal. Germany, Britain and France had spent years and slaughtered millions of men in the useless exercise of proving this point.

While Britain held out hopes of American intervention, the German High Command still believed that they could win by means of the submarine blockade. Unrestricted U-boat warfare would bring Britain to her knees, Berlin was convinced. The danger was that it would antagonize the United States and might bring her in on the Allies' side. But this was a gamble Berlin was prepared to take.

It was a gamble which might have come off. Germany had certain military advantages in 1917. One was the gradual collapse of Russia which meant that Germany was able to transfer many divisions from the eastern front to France. Another was the confused state of opinion in America, with its large numbers of German immigrants. The sinking of the *Lusitania* with the loss of 1,198 lives, 124 of them American, had angered the United States. But that had been in 1915, and despite the continued U-boat warfare, America had still kept out of the war. Unrestricted submarine warfare might well bring them in against Germany, but Berlin believed that she could defeat Britain by U-boat sinkings before America could mobilize.

In this matter the Germans reckoned that they had the character of the American President on their side. Woodrow Wilson's policy of "peace without victory" made no appeal to either Germany or the Allies, though in the context of history it was common sense, and the only solution if America was to stay out of the war. Wilson saw the situation as clearly as Schlieffen had done. Despite the strong body of American opinion in favour of entering the war against Germany the President, who did not believe that war accomplished anything, was prepared to face the prospect of American ships being sunk on sight.

Berlin might have got away with their gamble of unrestricted

U-boat sinkings, but for Zimmermann's momentous blunder, which arose out of Germany's schemes to make so much trouble at home for the United States that even if she did go to war with Germany she would have to keep much of her army at home for purposes of defence.

The idea was to involve Mexico and Japan in hostilities with America. Mexico's long-standing grievance with America over Texas, New Mexico and Arizona was a little stale by 1917, but the revolution of 1910 caused very bad relations with the United States. The revolution brought much internal confusion to Mexico, and there was great agitation by Americans with interests in Mexico for intervention by the United States. During the war Mexico was loudly pro-German in her sympathies. Berlin did its best to add fuel to this particular fire, using Japan as the third party. Japan had long regarded America as a potential enemy, realizing she was her only serious rival in the Pacific.

The Kaiser had seen what he called the Yellow Peril as early as 1895. Later the Russo-Japanese War had underlined his fears and caused him great distress. The thought of the inferior yellow men beating white men offended his racial instincts. But this did not prevent him from trying to get Japan to attack America, any more than his affectionate letters to Tsar Nicholas II ("Dear Nicky . . . Yours affectionately, Willy") stopped him going to war with Russia in 1914.

Japan had been in a state of war with Germany since 9 August 1914, in accordance with her treaty with Britain of 1902. But after quickly snapping up the German Pacific islands, with their valuable naval bases, at small cost to herself, and much to the alarm of Australia and New Zealand, Japan took little part in the war, apart from sending ships for convoy duties to the Mediterranean, and was certainly not so foolish as to get involved in the bloody stalemate in the trenches of Europe. Britain did not request her to anyway. She found the Japanese Alliance rather embarrassing.

It was plain from the rapacity with which Japan had seized upon the German Pacific islands that her spirit was more in tune with Germany than with the Allies. Germany herself saw this, and was not unsympathetic with Japan's point of view. Berlin tried to make Japan change sides.

Japan was only a half-hearted ally, content to play it both

ways. She did this in the two World Wars, in which she pursued her own ambitious policies, getting what she could out of the European combatants, all of whom she at heart despised. She knew she was not welcome in the European club anyway.

Germany's plan in 1917 was to stir up trouble between Japan and America, using the disgruntled Mexico as a pawn. Berlin reckoned that if Japan got involved in a war with America then Britain, for racial and economic reasons, would immediately side with America against Japan.

In January 1917 Germany decided on unrestricted submarine warfare and on the 16th Arthur Zimmermann, their Secretary of State, sent the following coded telegram to the German Ambassador in Mexico:

> WE INTEND TO BEGIN UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE ON THE FIRST OF FEBRUARY. WE SHALL ENDEAVOUR IN SPITE OF THIS TO KEEP THE UNITED STATES NEUTRAL. IN THE EVENT OF THIS NOT SUCCEEDING, WE MAKE MEXICO A PROPOSAL OF ALLIANCE ON THE FOLLOWING BASIS: MAKE WAR TOGETHER, MAKE PEACE TOGETHER, GENEROUS FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND AN UNDERSTANDING ON OUR PART THAT MEXICO IS TO RECONQUER THE LOST TERRITORY IN TEXAS, NEW MEXICO AND ARIZONA. THE SETTLEMENT IN DETAIL IS LEFT TO YOU. YOU WILL INFORM THE PRESIDENT [OF MEXICO] OF THE ABOVE MOST SECRETLY AS SOON AS THE OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH THE UNITED STATES IS CERTAIN AND ADD THE SUGGESTION THAT HE SHOULD ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE INVITE JAPAN TO IMMEDIATE ADHERENCE AND AT THE SAME TIME MEDIATE BETWEEN JAPAN AND OURSELVES.
>
> PLEASE CALL THE PRESIDENT'S ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THE UNRESTRICTED EMPLOYMENT OF OUR SUBMARINES NOW OFFERS THE PROSPECT OF COMPELLING ENGLAND TO MAKE PEACE WITHIN A FEW MONTHS. ACKNOWLEDGE PLEASE – ZIMMERMANN.

Zimmermann sent the telegram by three separate channels to ensure its arrival. Firstly through the secret diplomatic line between Berlin and Washington, in disregard of diplomatic usage. This line went via Copenhagen through England and the British transatlantic cable to Washington, where the State Department handed the telegram to Count Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, together with Zimmermann's instruction to Bernstorff which read: "Most secret. For Your Excellency's personal information and to be handed to the Imperial Minister in Mexico by a safe route."

Zimmermann also sent the telegram from Nauen, near Berlin, to the big commercial wireless station at Sayville, New York, and to make trebly sure via a Swedish route.

The State Department passed the telegram to the German Ambassador with some misgiving, suspecting that diplomatic usage was being abused, not dreaming of the dynamite contained in the close-packed series of numerals which the encoded message presented to the eyes of the American officials.

Bernstorff decoded the numerals, read it with some sorrow, for he believed that the mediation of Woodrow Wilson offered the best solution for Germany. He then re-encoded it and sent it to Mexico by Western Union.

This was 17 January, and on that same day the telegram was being decoded by cypher experts in a secret room in Whitehall, London, known innocently as Department 40, or sometimes as 40 O.B. (from Room 40, Old Building, Admiralty). This was the nerve centre of the Naval Intelligence Department which was run by Admiral Sir Reginald Hall with such remarkable success during the First World War.

Hall was something of a genius at espionage, for he had a keen political sense. It is one thing to discover secrets. It is another thing to be able to evaluate their importance. A man who can do this reaches the heights in espionage. Richard Sorge was such a man. Reginald Hall another. He specialized in breaking the German codes.

The Committee of Imperial Defence had laid down an instruction in 1912 that, should Britain go to war with Germany, the first naval assignment was to be the cutting of Germany's Atlantic cables. This was done on the morning of 5 August 1914, by the

cable ship *Telconia*, which wound in hundreds of yards of the cable so as to make the damage irreparable. Germany thenceforth had to rely on wireless communication for her diplomatic contact with the outside world, and Britain then set up monitoring stations.

Later in August 1914 the German light cruiser *Magdeburg* ran on the rocks while minelaying in the Baltic and was surprised in this helpless position by Russian warships, who promptly opened fire. As the *Magdeburg* went down, her signalman was killed in the act of throwing the weighted German naval code book overboard. He was picked up by the Russians with the book firmly in his death clasp. The Russian Admiralty had the wisdom to send this inestimable prize to their allies in London where it became the cornerstone of the success of Department 40. It gave Hall's cypher experts the clue to the cryptographic system the Germans were using, and enabled them to read all the secret messages which Germany sent to her diplomats abroad over the Nauen radio.

Hall also intercepted German naval radio messages, with the result that the British fleet was able to encounter German naval forces when the latter would rather have avoided combat on account of their inferior strength. It cannot be said that the British armed forces always matched in performance the sparkling success of Hall's Naval Intelligence Department. The Battle of Jutland resulted from Hall's interception of secret radio messages of the German High Seas Fleet. Yet the British, with the larger fleet, were unable to beat the German Navy, mainly because the British capital ships were inferior and German gunnery better.*

In 1915 the Germans changed their code and it was discovered that one of their confidential code clerks was a Croydon-born Austrian named Alexander Szek. The British Secret Service was able to put pressure upon him to betray the code, and he copied it out page by page. Then he not unnaturally wanted to escape to England, fearful of his treachery being discovered. But he was not allowed to do this, for as soon as the Germans knew the code had been stolen they would change it, and Szek's work for the country of his birth, though not his adoption, would be in vain. Instead the unfortunate Szek encountered a convenient fatal accident and the Germans, not suspecting what had happened, continued to use the code, much to the profit of Department 40

*See *The Swordbearers* by Corelli Barnett (pp. 181-194).

and the benefit of the British cause. After the war Szek's father accused the British Secret Service of murdering his son. But in the grim days of 1915, with the flower of British manhood dying like flies in the trenches, the life of an Austrian code clerk was judged of no account.

Another valuable German code came into the hands of Admiral Hall in 1915, when the baggage of Wilhelm Wassmuss – who was a kind of Teutonic Lawrence of Arabia – was captured in Persia. In it was found the German diplomatic code.

Whitehall was thus in the position of being able to intercept and decode all German naval and diplomatic wireless traffic. If Department 40 had been in the hands of a lesser man, it would doubtless have done something which would have betrayed to the Germans that their codes were no longer secret and they might as well transmit in clear. But Admiral Hall always took great care to do nothing which would reveal to the Germans that he knew their code. Sometimes this meant disregarding pieces of secret information, which more than once led him into trouble. But he had a habit of riding roughshod over everybody, both senior and junior. He was so successful that his position was impregnable.

He was fortunate in that the Germans did not frequently change their codes. In fact they used the same ones with predictable variations throughout the war. They had sublime confidence in their own efficiency and superiority, and contempt for both the British and the Americans whom they regarded as fools. This assumption of superiority and underestimation of the enemy was fatal to the German cause, as was seen in the previous chapter, when Moltke underestimated the French army with disastrous results to himself.

On the morning of 17 January 1917, when Department 40 decoded Zimmermann's telegram to the German Ambassador in Mexico, they immediately realized the tremendous importance of the message and summoned Admiral Hall.

With this piece of diplomatic dynamite in his hand, Hall knew he had to solve the vital problem of making use of it without revealing that he knew the German code. He was acutely aware that the Zimmermann Telegram would bring about that which Britain almost desperately desired – American entry into the war. His duty was to place it before the Foreign Secretary, Arthur

Balfour. While unrestricted submarine warfare might still not be sufficient provocation to push the hesitating Woodrow Wilson into the war, the threat to the territory of the United States itself contained in Zimmermann's message would certainly do so.

Instead of rushing round to the Foreign Office with the momentous piece of paper, Hall went to his office to think. If Balfour showed the message to Wilter Hines Page, the American Ambassador, Page would immediately inform Washington. But Page was so pro-British that the President distrusted him, and when Washington saw the Zimmermann Telegram and were told where Page had got it, they would think that British intelligence had faked it in order to trick America into the war. The Germans, on the other hand, knowing the telegram was genuine, would know that the British had cracked their code. And nothing would be gained.

The more Hall thought about it, the more he realized that if Britain was to get full advantage of this great prize which had fallen into his hands it would have to be handled with skill and cunning. And politicians did not possess skill and cunning in such matters.

A master-hand was required, and Hall did not doubt that that master-hand was his. After all, it was for such an occasion that he had worked all these years in Department 40. He was not going to throw away this priceless gem of information. He intended to use it to its greatest effect, and at the same time safeguard the secrets of Department 40, which he did not like sharing with anyone. No one but himself and his carefully picked staff knew how thoroughly they had broken down the German codes. Such secrets were kept even from the Prime Minister.

So he locked the Zimmermann Telegram in his safe and determined to say nothing about it until he had devised a really effective way of using it.

He found out about the three channels which Zimmermann had used to send the telegram in order to ensure its safe arrival. Hall got in touch with his man in Mexico, a "Mr H", and told him to get hold of a copy of the telegram.

"Mr H" was able to do this in rather fortuitous circumstances. He had in the course of his duties made friends, naturally enough, with a member of the staff of the Mexican Telegraph Office. This man had become innocently involved with someone charged with

forging currency, then a capital offence. "Mr H" was able to intervene effectively in diplomatic circles, and in gratitude the man in the telegraph office got him a copy of the Zimmermann Telegram.

When Hall received this in London he was delighted, for this was the telegram which the German Ambassador had sent from Washington to Mexico after decoding and re-encoding Zimmermann's telegram to him, and it contained certain additions put in at the Washington end.

The next step was to make it appear that the telegram had been betrayed to Allied intelligence either in Washington or Mexico. Washington, when it received a copy of the telegram, would be able to check its authenticity in the Western Union files. Finally, to cover the possibility of the Germans finding out that their code was known to Department 40, Hall arranged that the telegram should be decoded by American experts in their Embassy, with help, of course from the knowledge of German codes which British Naval Intelligence had acquired.

By the end of January unlimited submarine warfare had started and all ships were sunk at sight in the British approaches. America broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, but, as Germany had anticipated, the sinking of American shipping did not push Wilson into declaring war. Germany had calculated right, and if they had not tried to involve the United States with Japan and Mexico, and threatened American soil, it is probable that Wilson would have stayed neutral.

In that case England almost certainly would have collapsed in 1917. In April one out of every four ships which left English ports was torpedoed. Nearly a million tons of shipping, two-thirds of it British, were sunk in that month. Neutral ships refused to sail for British ports. There was only six weeks' supply of wheat left in Britain. No pit props were coming from Norway, and as the British coal industry was almost entirely dependent upon this supply it would soon come to a halt.

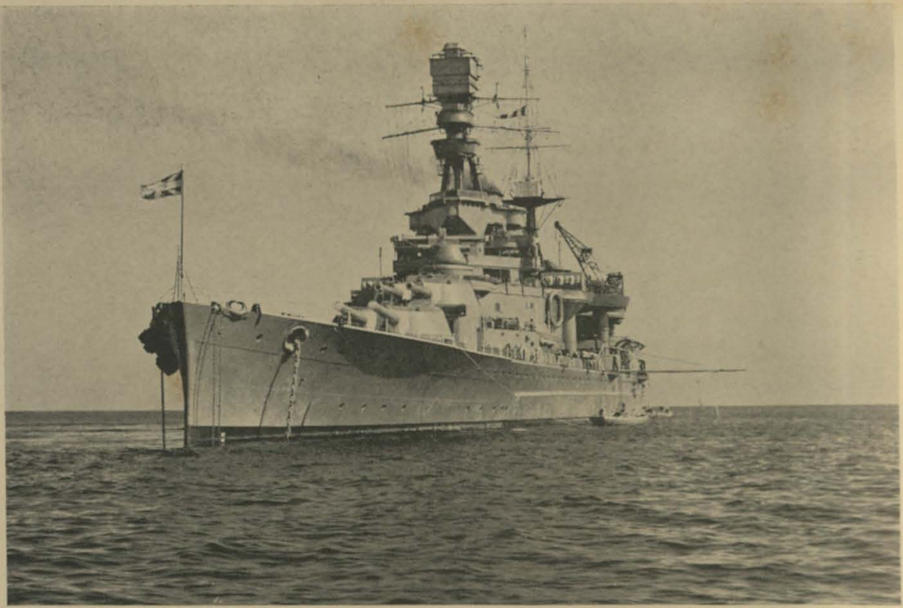
It was the very worst year of the war for Britain, and perhaps the most serious aspect of the situation was the lowering of civilian morale and labour unrest. It was the year of revolution. In Russia the Tsarist regime was overthrown and the Bolshevists came into power. In France there were serious mutinies in the army, in





Top: a dogfight seen from Holborn Circus. The Luftwaffe's attack on London in the autumn of 1940 was an admission of failure—it was built for short-range tactical support for troops and armour. Hitler's failure to appreciate the importance of a long-range air force was one of the reasons why he lost the war.

Above: the defeated at Stalingrad in February 1943. Hitler's overestimation of the capability of the Wehrmacht to conquer and subdue Russia was without doubt his greatest mistake. The Wehrmacht was unequal to the task. The terrible defeat at Stalingrad was perhaps the German Army's greatest humiliation.





Top: H.M.S. *Repulse* was despatched to the Far East late in 1941 in company with H.M.S. *Prince of Wales*, with the object of deterring the Japanese from attacking south-east Asia. It turned out to be a tragic blunder. Both ships were rapidly sunk by Japanese bombers.

Above: Port Said, 1956, showing blockships at the entrance of the Suez Canal. The attack upon Suez was the result of collusion between Britain, France and Israel, and has proved to be the greatest mistake Britain has made for many years.

Britain widespread strikes. But the American declaration of war in April changed the whole situation, gave both Britain and France the extra boost to their morale and revived their fading hopes of victory. It turned the scales.

Although the unlimited U-boat sinkings brought America to the brink of war, Woodrow Wilson was still anxious to force Britain into a negotiated peace. Britain, at the very limit of her financial resources, was trying to negotiate a loan from America, but Wilson was prepared to give credit only on the condition of a negotiated peace.

The Zimmermann Telegram changed everything. Though the President – shocked, pale with anger when he read the telegram – still hesitated, the call for war was now irresistible in America.

The telegram was released to the world's press and created the expected sensation. It was recognized that Germany had made the greatest mistake of the war, and one of the greatest in her history. The *Literary Digest* published a résumé of American newspaper press comment under the apt heading: HOW ZIMMERMANN UNITED THE UNITED STATES.

Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who was among those who believed that America should enter the war, had said earlier: "I hope these blundering Germans will blunder soon." He had had the blunder he wished for. Even the pacific President Wilson boiled with rage at the insult to America contained in the telegram. War was inevitable now.

In London there was the profoundest satisfaction. The Americans had played it so beautifully that the State Department had given out a distinct hint that the telegram had been obtained by a daring spy either in Washington or Mexico. Nothing could have suited Hall's purposes better, for if America had known the true source of the leak, cries of perfidious Albion would instantly have been raised, particularly among the strong Irish element in the United States.

The important thing from Hall's point of view was that the impression was given that it was the clear copy of the telegram which had been stolen, not the coded copy. And this is what the Germans believed. They were still ignorant of the fact that their code was known in London, and they continued to use it.

There were of course bitter recriminations in Berlin. Both the

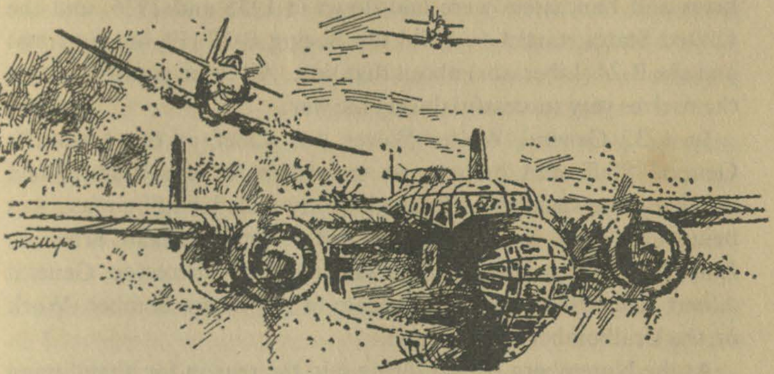
Mexican and Japanese governments expressed complete ignorance of the matter. Neither country wanted to get mixed up in such ham-fisted diplomacy. Mexico affirmed its neutrality. Japan pursued its comfortable path of profitable belligerency.

Zimmermann challenged Washington to prove authenticity of the telegram. This was hardly wise seeing that Washington was easily able to do so, as he surely must have known. Zimmermann then held a press conference and admitted that he sent the telegram – "to the profoundest amazement and relief of all concerned", as the American Secretary of State put it. There were no doubts now in the United States. Zimmermann's statement made it plain that Germany was proposing to attack the United States. Nothing could be calculated to induce Americans to take up arms quicker. They flocked to the colours.

For Germany it was the beginning of the end. The arrival of the American army in France was like a blood transfusion for the dispirited trench-weary soldiers. As Winston Churchill put it: "The impression made upon the hard-pressed French by this seemingly inexhaustible flood of gleaming youth in its first maturity of health and vigour, was prodigious."

In vain Berlin tried to find out who had shopped them by betraying the Zimmermann Telegram, and Department 40 had an entertaining time reading the diplomatic recriminations which went back and forth in imagined secrecy between Berlin, Washington and Mexico.

In the end Bernstorff got the blame, with Zimmermann. Bernstorff was of course entirely innocent, and Zimmermann was not wholly guilty. The spirit of Germany in both World Wars was one of contempt for, and underestimation of, her enemies, and for these mistakes she paid dearly.



The Eagle that Failed

The Luftwaffe, created in March 1935 and disbanded in May 1945, gained a formidable reputation for itself in its short life. During the years of German total war its very name spelled terror and ruthlessness. From the military point of view its close support for the highly mobile German army revolutionized the concept of warfare.

Nevertheless the Luftwaffe was regarded as an almost total failure by Hitler. It was unable to prevent the British evacuation of Dunkirk, it failed to destroy the Russian Air Force, or interfere seriously with the D-Day landings in Normandy. Its most significant failure was its encounter with the Royal Air Force in the summer of 1940, when it found itself completely unable to establish the air superiority necessary for Operation Sea Lion – Hitler's invasion of Britain.

The Luftwaffe's success was solely in short-range tactical support for advancing troops and armour. In every other field of aerial warfare it failed miserably. It was in fact created for the sole purpose of tactical military support. Hitler's failure to appreciate

the importance of a long-range air force was one of the mistakes which lost him the Second World War.

The subject of four-engined bombers was under active consideration by the air force planners of the world in the mid-nineteen-thirties. The plans for the Royal Air Force's Stirlings, Halifaxes and Lancasters were laid down in 1935 and 1936, and the United States started to build the Boeing B-17 (Flying Fortress) and the B-24 (Liberator) about that time. All these aircraft proved themselves very successful during the war.

In 1935 General Walter Wever was Chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, and he was an enthusiast for the four-engined bomber. One such aircraft, significantly called Uralbomber, was being developed by the Junkers and Dornier aircraft firms. In June 1936 Wever died in an air crash and his successor, General Albert Kesselring, was no advocate of the heavy bomber. Work on the Uralbomber was stopped.

At the Nuremberg trials Göring said the reason for abandoning the long-range bomber was lack of aluminium, combined with dissatisfaction with the Uralbomber design. Kesselring said the same thing, adding that the General Staff had a low opinion of the four-engined bomber. Others said that it was abandoned in the planning stage, not because there was anything wrong with the designs but on account of cost.

There is little doubt that Göring saw the Luftwaffe as a medium-ranged continental weapon, a kind of flying artillery of the Wehrmacht; but Göring did not envisage war with Great Britain. The accuracy of high-level bombing was seriously questioned, and the enthusiasts for the dive-bomber and medium bomber won the day.

So obsessed was the Luftwaffe Command with dive-bombers that when Heinkels were developing their heavy bomber, the He 177, they were told that before it could enter Luftwaffe service it must be adapted for dive-bombing. The technical difficulties this involved caused long production delays. The He 177 was held up for years and finally proved a failure. Dive-bombers proved useless when faced with the R.A.F. which shot them down wholesale.

By 1939 the Luftwaffe had developed five aeroplanes which became the backbone of their fighting strength during the Second

World War. There were two types of twin-engined medium bombers, the Heinkel 111 and the Dornier 17. The dive-bomber was the Junkers Ju 87, called the Stuka, and there were two main types of fighter, the Messerschmitt 109 and the Messerschmitt 110. It was an air force designed for short-term offensive only, and generally speaking it failed lamentably, despite the skill and daring of its pilots, the high efficiency of the aircraft industry behind it, and the brilliance of the German military mind able to create a Wehrmacht which revolutionized the tactics of warfare.

The mistaken planning of the Luftwaffe first became obvious during and after the Battle of Britain. But during the campaigns in Poland in the autumn of 1939, in Norway in the Spring of 1940 and in the Netherlands, Belgium and France in the early summer of the same year, the Luftwaffe was seen at its best and most successful. It completely dominated the skies. Its ruthless bombing of Rotterdam, its machine-gunning of refugee columns, and the terror caused by the dive-bombing Stukas, accentuated by the peculiar noise they made, established for the Luftwaffe a lasting reputation for ruthlessness and invincibility. Throughout the Second World War, even when its shortcomings and weaknesses were obvious to the discerning, it was nevertheless generally held in awe. It gained its undeserved reputation of invincibility by terror tactics against helpless civilians and ground forces unable to put up effective defence.

The great victory in Europe of 1940 caught Hitler unprepared. He did not expect the Allied collapse. Taken unawares by the suddenness of their victory, the Germans allowed the British Expeditionary Force to escape from Dunkirk in one of the most skilfully executed and difficult withdrawals of military history.

After Dunkirk the British faced Germany alone, in "their finest hour" as Churchill not inappropriately described it. Immediate invasion was expected, though the truth of the situation must have been obvious to many. Surprised by his own success, Hitler had no cut-and-dried plans to invade Britain.

The Wehrmacht in 1940 was the most powerful and efficient army in the world. Its success was due to effective armour and highly mechanized troops in large numbers supported by ground attack aircraft, mainly dive-bombers. This military machine was led by professionals and not the kind of gentleman amateurs who

queered the pitch for Germany in the opening stages of the First World War. The Wehrmacht had proved its deadly efficiency in the campaigns in Poland, Norway and France, demonstrating its ability to overwhelm any ground defence and then penetrate quickly and deeply into enemy territory. There was no army at that time, in any country in Europe, capable of stopping the Wehrmacht. The German victories had moreover been achieved with relatively small casualties.

In 1940 Germany was very pleased with herself, and its complacency was something which Britain had not anticipated and did not fully understand. Britain imagined that Hitler would rush to finish them off and so complete his task of conquest in the West.

But Germany's mood in the summer of 1940 was that of celebration rather then belligerency. War had paid tremendous dividends. The Wehrmacht's success had been greater than Hitler had dreamed. The victory had been incredibly swift. All Hitler's critics were silenced. What had been accomplished had been greater than anything Napoleon had done. It compared with the dazzling victories of Alexander the Great. No one was tactless enough to make the comparison with Jenghis Khan.

In a few months the whole of the mainland of western Europe, from the North Cape to the Pyrenees, had been conquered by German arms. In three whirlwind and brilliant campaigns the Führer had led Germany to overwhelming victory with the maximum amount of glory and the minimum number of casualties. The war was as good as over. The day of the thousand-years-Reich had dawned.

It was true that one obstacle remained to cast a shadow over the Nazi dream of empire. But Britain would have to accept the situation. If not, Göring promised, she would be quickly bombed into surrender by the Luftwaffe's terror attacks against English centres of population.

What next? The question was still being debated by Hitler and his high command at the time when Britain was feverishly mining and barbed-wiring the beaches and putting up anti-invasion road blocks.

All the same, Hitler was aware that the conquest of Britain was "the prerequisite for final victory". He had issued a directive to his

military chiefs to this effect at the end of November 1939. In fact a staff study of the invasion of Britain had already been made. After the fall of France, Britain exasperated Hitler by refusing to recognize defeat. Hitler made the same mistake as Napoleon in imagining that an overwhelming victory on the continent would compel England to yield. On 16 July he ordered preparations to go forward for invasion.

At this time the German army consisted of 150 divisions. It was reckoned that Britain could be invaded and subdued by forty divisions. In the summer of 1940 Germany appeared to have too large an army, and its General Staff were actually discussing partial demobilization.

It was plain that the German Navy was too weak to lend effective support to the landings in Britain in face of the overwhelming strength of the Royal Navy. For this reason its commander-in-chief, Admiral Raeder, was consistently opposed to the invasion, and in any case Operation Sea Lion could only succeed with *complete* air superiority. Whatever Göring said, his fellow Nazi leaders were doubtful whether the Luftwaffe had that.

The German General Staff occupied themselves with various schemes for the invasion of Britain during that jubilant summer of 1940. Two plans were put forward – the first for a landing on a broad front on the south coast, the second, following protests from the Navy, for a similar operation on a narrow front. Either plan depended for its success largely upon the Luftwaffe.

But the Luftwaffe, in view of the growing strength of the R.A.F., faced a task which was completely beyond its powers. It had first of all to cripple the R.A.F. and destroy its many and scattered bases in order to deprive it of air superiority and prevent it hindering the landings. It had then to establish its own air superiority over England in order to subdue the British Army and the Royal Navy, and at the same time bomb and batter the British into submission.

The Luftwaffe had never before encountered a first-class opponent. The R.A.F. was a professional air force with a long and distinguished history and a completely independent command. Its morale was excellent and it was equipped with fighters which were the equal of the Luftwaffe's best machine, the Messerschmitt 109. In fighter strength it was by no means outnumbered, as has

often been said. What was more important, the R.A.F. was better equipped than the Luftwaffe for fighting such a battle.

While the plans for Sea Lion were giving Raeder nightmares, and causing doubts in Hitler's mind, Hermann Göring and his staff were occupying themselves with their own particular plans for an air offensive. Göring was not really interested in Sea Lion, believing that his invincible Luftwaffe could bring Britain to her knees. And so that summer the extraordinary situation existed in the German High Command of there being no proper consultation between the Air Force and the Army over the planning of Sea Lion. The invasion plan was already based on a dangerous overestimation of the German Navy's capabilities. Even so, Raeder said it would take ten days to put the first assault wave across the Channel.

Operation Eagle, the Luftwaffe attack on Britain, was always thought to be part of a well-planned military operation which failed. While such a plan existed in the minds of the High Command, Göring, always a law unto himself, did not consider Eagle as part of Sea Lion. So far as he was concerned, Eagle would crush England, which would quickly submit to the might of the Luftwaffe. According to a Hitler directive of 1 August, Eagle was mounted "to establish conditions favourable for the conquest of Britain", even though at this time the High Command was doubtful as to the practicability of invading England at all.

Eagle was launched on 13 August 1940. England called it the Blitz, and the air raids lasted until the following spring, though by mid-September Eagle had failed and Sea Lion was abandoned.

By this time Hitler's mind was occupied with Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia. This had been actively discussed with his war chiefs as early as 13 July. Hitler gave the excuse that Stalin was flirting with Britain with the object of keeping her in the war, the Soviet Union fearing that Germany was becoming too strong. Hitler did not really need to make such excuses, as the destruction of Communism was part of the Nazi philosophy.

By 31 July Hitler was already sceptical about the feasibility of invading Britain. The invasion of Russia was the strategy he resolved to employ, should Sea Lion fail or be abandoned. The eastern adventure was of course dearest to Hitler's heart. He was prepared to live with a Britain robbed of its empire and cleansed

of Jewry, but he was not prepared to live with Communist Russia, which was the real enemy.

It has even been suggested that Operations Eagle and Sea Lion were only mooted in order to keep the German forces occupied while Hitler planned Operation Barbarossa, which was to be the greatest military operation of all time and the one which brought about the downfall of Nazi Germany.

Whether this be so or not – and it is difficult to believe that Hitler did not do his best to encompass Britain's military defeat in 1940 – Operation Eagle was a serious and damaging encounter, damaging to both sides; and the Wehrmacht went through all the motions of the invasion of Britain in the autumn of 1940. Moreover the battle which ensued over the skies of south-eastern England was one of the most important and significant of the Second World War.

Karl Klee, the German historian, regards it as the beginning of the German defeat. "The whole complex of the political and military events between the conclusion of the campaign in France and the opening of the campaign in Russia," he writes, "must be regarded as the actual turning point of the war. Due to the faulty appraisal of this situation by the highest German political authoities, the war from then on took a course leading to disaster for Germany."*

Although the Luftwaffe was regarded as the most powerful and efficient air force in existence, it had not until 1940 fully encountered a first-class air force, or indeed any serious opposition at all. In every previous field of operation it had easily crushed all opposition from both ground and air. It therefore embarked upon Operation Eagle with sublime confidence, if not complacency.

It was the first attempt ever made to use air power alone in order to gain a strategic success, and it does not seem to have occurred to the Luftwaffe leaders that their air force had been created for an entirely different purpose – that of short-range ground support of mobile troops.

Of its two fighters one – the Messerschmitt 109 – was superb, but it had such a short range of operation that it could not escort

* Quoted from Klee's unpublished MS. 'Operation Sea Lion and the Role Planned for the Luftwaffe', in *The Breaking Wave: the German Defeat in the Summer of 1940*, by Telford Taylor (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).

the bombers farther into England than the south-eastern corner and the London area. The other fighter, the twin-engined Messerschmitt 110, was useless against Spitfires and Hurricanes, a fact which should have been obvious to the Luftwaffe before Eagle was launched. The deficiencies of the Luftwaffe had in fact become evident during the evacuation of Dunkirk, when the R.A.F. fought the German air force out of the skies. Dunkirk was in fact the Luftwaffe's first reverse, and should have been taken as a serious warning by Göring.

This is not to say that the Luftwaffe was completely outclassed by the R.A.F. The Germans in fact put up a tremendous fight and were beaten in fair battle. They fought under the great disadvantage of not possessing the right aircraft for the task they were attempting. Göring seemed unaware that the difference between a tactical air force, which the Luftwaffe was, and a strategic air force, which was what he should have had for Operation Eagle, was the difference between defeat and victory.

As was seen in the case of Moltke in 1914, battles are won and lost in the minds of the Commanders-in-Chief. While Göring had no lack of confidence, he was no professional. He had not grasped the essentials of air warfare, as they had been grasped and fully understood by the cool professional minds who commanded the R.A.F.

Of all the nations who fought in the Second World War only Britain and the United States developed properly balanced air forces, with their own independent commands and capable of long-range strategic action. The air forces of Germany, Russia, France and Italy were designed as support for ground forces. The R.A.F. and the U.S.A.A.F. were designed as separate, strategic, long-range striking forces, and this is what Göring should have had in order to bomb and subdue Britain into submission in 1940.

And so the Luftwaffe began Operation Eagle, depending – as indeed it did throughout the rest of the war – upon short-range fighters, dive-bombers and twin-engined medium bombers, and without any heavy bombers at all. The force they faced was the oldest independent air arm in the world, more highly developed than the Luftwaffe.

R.A.F. Fighter Command was armed with up-to-date aircraft of superb design and effectiveness – the Supermarine Spitfire and

the Hawker Hurricane. The Spitfire was a superior fighter to the Hurricane, and at the beginning of the Battle of Britain, Fighter Command had thirty squadrons of Hurricanes and nineteen squadrons of Spitfires. Both of these fighters were armed with eight .303 Browning machine-guns set in the wings and firing forwards. It was a devastating fire-power for the period and tremendously effective. Although the performance of the Hurricane was slightly inferior to the Me 109, the Hurricane's fire-power often proved decisive in combat. The performance of the Me 109 was about equal to that of the Spitfire.

Fighter Command had mustered about 700 fighters at the beginning of the Battle of Britain, and was receiving in addition about 500 Spitfires and Hurricanes per month as replacements and for equipping new squadrons. Throughout the whole period of the Battle of Britain, it was able to maintain an average of 608 aircraft and crews ready for operations each day. At the end of the battle, on 21 September, it had 715 aircraft, and during that month 400 Hurricanes and Spitfires were built.

The R.A.F. in fact emerged from the battle a stronger force than when it started. It suffered great losses, but it was at a period of great expansion. It won because it was the better air force, much better equipped to fight the battle that was taking place, and because it was superbly supported by Lord Beaverbrook's Ministry of Aircraft Production and the aircraft industry itself.

Opposed to it, the Luftwaffe put up about 1,000 bombers – Heinkel 111s, Dornier 17s and Junkers 87s, and about eight hundred Messerschmitt 109s.

The R.A.F. therefore were well outnumbered, aircraft for aircraft, though in actual fact the contest was about equal. The German bombers were sitting ducks as far as the Spitfires and Hurricanes were concerned. Their job was to avoid the R.A.F. so that they could survive to drop their bombs. The R.A.F.'s real opponents were the 800 Messerschmitt 109s, which flew in support of the bombers. The two effective fighting forces therefore were roughly equal.

The R.A.F. had one other great advantage – radar, the effect of which was foolishly underestimated by the German High Command. Radar meant that Fighter Command, instead of being forced to maintain patrols searching for the invading Luftwaffe

squadrons, received prior warning of their approach, with their position and height, and was able to place its squadrons of Spitfires and Hurricanes at the right place for attack.

The R.A.F. was therefore in a much better position and was better equipped than the Luftwaffe. It had the additional advantage of fighting over its home ground, where pilots of disabled planes could parachute to safety and return to their duties, and even crashed planes were not necessarily irretrievably lost. The R.A.F.'s main deficiency was in trained pilots who were going into service at the time at the rate of about fifty a week. There were in fact twice as many aircraft as there were pilots to fly them. In skill and morale there was little to choose between the German and the British pilots; the two air forces had great respect for each other.

The real Battle of Britain then was between the 700 Spitfires and Hurricanes and the 800 Messerschmitt 109s. The Heinkels and Dorniers were there to avoid attack and they could not get through without their fighter escort. The R.A.F. on the other hand were under orders to attack the bombers and avoid combat with the Me 109s if possible. The R.A.F.'s job was to prevent the bombers getting to their target. Breaking up their formations and shooting them down was more important than engaging the German fighters.

The short range of the Messerschmitt 109s, and the failure of the Messerschmitt 110s to stand up to the Spitfires and Hurricanes, told heavily against the Luftwaffe from the start, and it meant that the operations had to be confined to the south-eastern corner of England.

Operation Eagle began on 13 August. On the 15th there were mass attacks on centres in south-east England by bombers based in France and Belgium escorted by Me 109s, and on industrial centres in the north-east by aircraft based in Norway and Denmark escorted by the twin-engined Me 110s. By the 18th the Luftwaffe had lost 236 aircraft against 95 by the British. The Me 110s were withdrawn as daytime fighter escorts as they proved useless against Hurricanes and Spitfires. The Stukas also proved a failure, 30 being lost on 18 August alone. Slow, unwieldy, they were about the most vulnerable warplane that ever flew.

So effective had been the opposition of Fighter Command that the Luftwaffe spent the rest of the month in a determined

attempt to knock out the R.A.F. fighter stations in the south-east. Great damage was done and losses on both sides were heavy. By the beginning of September Fighter Command had not only survived, but, as Göring had to admit, was fighting as hard as ever. But although there were plenty of new fighters available, and its aircraft strength had been maintained, there was a crisis in personnel. Many pilots had been lost. Those who survived were exhausted and battle-weary, and not many of the new pilots were experienced enough to face the Luftwaffe aces with success.

Then, to the intense relief of Fighter Command, the Luftwaffe suddenly switched its attack to London, which previously it had been forbidden to bomb by Hitler's express order. The attack was said to have been made as a reprisal for small Bomber Command raids on Berlin at the end of August, but that could not have been the real reason for the switch of the Luftwaffe's tactics.

Göring could not have known that Fighter Command was dangerously overstrained by the Battle of Britain, despite the German propaganda's complaisant and foolish claim to have shot down 2,000 British fighters, which was more than they were supposed to have. Göring was well aware that the R.A.F. had survived the onslaught of Eagle, and still held the skies over Britain.

On 13 September Hitler told his generals that the R.A.F. had almost been eliminated and that the Luftwaffe now had a good chance to "force Britain to her knees". "Four or five days good weather and a decisive result will be achieved." He had decided to postpone Sea Lion, adding that invasion of Britain would not be necessary if the Luftwaffe achieved victory by early October.

This was not, as might be supposed, a propaganda statement issued for public consumption, but a supposedly realistic assessment of the military situation made to his war council.

While Hitler and his military advisers appeared to be living in cloud-cuckoo land, there came the famous 15 September, now remembered as Battle of Britain Day. Massive bomber attacks were launched upon London and partially repulsed with great losses by Fighter Command. The dogfights in the autumn skies went on all day long, and at the end Winston Churchill, who had witnessed the battle at Number 11 Group's headquarters at Uxbridge, announced that the R.A.F. had shot down 183 for the

loss of under forty fighters. The German losses were greatly over-estimated. Actually they lost 52. But the British had lost only twenty-six aircraft.

Defeat for the Luftwaffe was plain. 15 September marked the death of Sea Lion. Daytime mass bombing had failed. It was too costly. The Germans switched to night bombing and for months pounded London and other big centres of population. These raids were effective, spectacular and caused heavy loss of life and great damage. The Luftwaffe now had few losses. But the night Blitz made no difference to the course of the war. There was in fact no easy way to victory, and no way to victory at all so far as Germany was concerned.

During August and September, the crucial months of the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe lost about 1,400 aircraft of all types, while Britain lost 832 fighters, with a further 500 damaged. At this time Bomber Command casualties were negligible, and so it can be said that the losses of both sides were about equal, as the 500 damaged R.A.F. aircraft would not have survived but for the fact that they were able to make forced landings in friendly territory. Luftwaffe aircraft which force-landed in England were of course lost, with their crews.

Operation Eagle was not only a painful defeat for Germany, causing Hitler to postpone and finally abandon the invasion of Britain. It also exposed the Luftwaffe's serious limitations and the mistakes which had been made in its planning and construction. Their bombers were too light, and the dive-bombers and the Me 110s were useless in the face of first-class opposition.

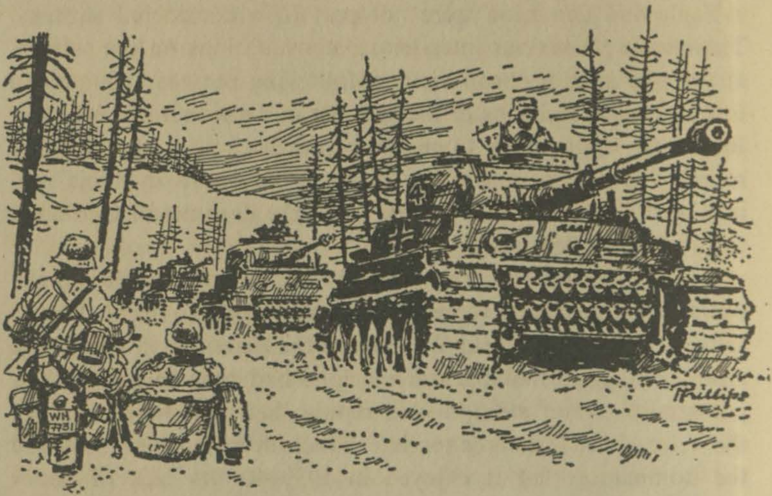
Although the Me 109 was a match for the Spitfire and superior to the Hurricane, it was seriously handicapped by the fact that its operational endurance was only ninety minutes. This meant that the daylight bombing had to be confined to south-east England. While a splendid combat machine, the Me 109 was ill-adapted as an escort fighter. The Me 110s, completely outclassed by the British fighters, had to be relegated to night fighters and sneak bombing raids.

The Luftwaffe's lack of heavy bombers crippled their bombing programme, and prevented their mounting a really effective attack upon the ports and factories of Britain. They were unable to retaliate when Bomber Command began to mount its massive

nightly assault on Germany later in the war. They were also unable to do any long-range bombing when they were fighting in the vast spaces of Russia.

Eagle and Sea Lion were not part of a considered strategy. There were no serious inter-service consultations on the subject. Hitler was after a cheap victory, following the easy triumph in France. His indecisions of the summer and autumn of 1940 gave Britain the opportunity to get her breath back after Dunkirk and recoup her losses, and then, under a far more dynamic and intelligent leader than the man who led the destinies of Germany, to go into the offensive.

Germany's lack of a truly strategic air force robbed her of the overwhelming striking force which was essential to her if she was to win the Second World War before the giants upon whom she unleashed her formidable war machine had time to gather their potentially greater strength and repulse her. The new weapons, the V.1 and the V.2 came too late. The Luftwaffe never recovered the dominance that it enjoyed in 1939–40. Its lack of heavy bombers put the Wehrmacht at a great disadvantage during the Allied invasion of Europe in 1944. Hitler and Göring learned the lesson of their defeat in the Battle of Britain too late.



Barbarossa

Few, few shall part where many meet!
The snow shall be their winding sheet,
And every turf beneath their feet
  Shall be a soldier's sepulchre.

These lines of Thomas Campbell on the Battle of Hohenlinden make an equally fitting epitaph to the attempts to conquer Russia made by Napoleon in 1812 and by Hitler in 1941.

The disastrous campaign of 1812 remains one of the most terrible military stories of history, though it was exceeded in magnitude and in horror by Operation Barbarossa, which was the greatest and most prolonged battle which armies have ever waged upon land.

Both Napoleon and Hitler made cardinal mistakes in invading Russia. How great was the mistake of Hitler – who had before him the lessons learned by Napoleon – will long be a matter of dispute.

"It is not great victories that win wars, but great blunders," said Field Marshal Smuts. "We ought to put up a statue in Trafalgar Square to Hitler for having been such a fool as to invade Russia." A Marshal of the Royal Air Force went further and said that

Hitler was the Allies' secret weapon during the Second World War.

Modern military historians do not agree with this contemptuous assessment of Hitler. A quarter of a century has elapsed since Barbarossa, and the cooler minds of today do not regard Hitler as a madman who led the great German Wehrmacht to disaster in the teeth of the opposition of its generals. This was the excuse made in Germany after 1945. An unbiased assessment of the facts reveals a rather different story.

The fact is that Germany failed to conquer Russia because the Wehrmacht was unequal to the gigantic task. A German colonel, Bernd von Kleist, said that the German army's fight against Russia was like an elephant attacking a host of ants, for though the elephant will kill thousands, even millions of ants, he will in the end be overcome by their numbers and eaten to the bone.

Early in the Russian campaign the Germans realized that it was greatly different from the exhilarating summer victories in the West in 1940. The Panzers were not advancing through a conquered country with a beaten population peering out through the windows of the houses as the tanks went by. A captain in the 18th Panzer Division wrote: "In spite of the distances we were advancing, there was no feeling, as there had been in France, of entry into a defeated nation. Instead there was resistance, always resistance, however hopeless. A single gun, a group of men with rifles. Once a man ran out of a cottage by the roadside, a grenade in each hand . . ."

This was the keynote of the Russian campaign, and it made it different to any other war the Germans had fought. The Russians simply refused to admit defeat. Their resistance was total, unyielding; as the ants died in their tens of thousands, tens of thousands more came to attack the elephant. Thus were Hitler's plans and hopes confounded.

The Wehrmacht's failure, says Alan Clark in *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict*, 1941–1945,* was essentially a military failure. Disagreements between the officer caste of the Army Staff (the O.K.H.) and Hitler's Supreme Command (the O.K.W.) were fundamental and highly damaging to the cause of the war. Clark does not accept the theory given by post-war German authorities that the defeat was caused by Hitler's interference in

*Hutchinson, 1965; Penguin, 1966.

military affairs. "Hitler has been a convenient repository for all the mistakes and miscalculations of German military policy." Clark said that the General Staff were wrong more often than Hitler in the campaigns in the East.

Hitler was in fact something of a military genius. He understood war, as Napoleon did, and he had little time for his generals, despising them for their class-consciousness and military caution. He had good reason to fear them, too, knowing well that they were the only people in Germany capable of opposing him. As for the generals, they despised the Nazi Party with its rabble-rousing origins among the beer-swilling lower classes. They feared its political irresponsibility. In particular they disliked the powerful S.A., the Nazis' private army of thugs and sadists, whose sub-human activities behind the front lines of the advancing Wehrmacht gave the German army an evil reputation.

After the ruthless army purge of 1938, Hitler made himself the sole and supreme commander of the German armed forces, with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (the O.K.W.).

The invasion of Russia had always been part of Hitler's plan of conquest. When he outlined to his generals his plan for European war – "which must come in my lifetime" – he said that the Russo-German pact of 24 August 1939 was only made in order to stall for time.

"We will crush the Soviet Union," he said at the Berghof Conference of 22 August 1939. Already Poland was doomed, and he had ordered to the East the S.S. Death's Head units, "with orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of Polish race or language". He said that his only fear was that "some *schweinhund* will make a proposal for mediation". During the Battle of France in June 1940 he had told Jodl that he intended "to take action against this menace of the Soviet Union the moment our military position makes it at all possible". The Wehrmacht's great triumphs in the West made the invasion of Russia inevitable.

Hitler said war against Russia was "the be-all and end-all of Nazism". "Russia to him," wrote Professor Hugh Trevor Roper in the *Sunday Times* in 1960, "was simply land to be occupied when the natives (conveniently dismissed as sub-men) had been cleared off. 'Insofar as we don't need them, they may die.' . . . Hitler's

aggression against Russia was of a murderous brutality unexampled in history."

The thousand-year-Reich was impossible with the existence of Russia in Europe. The two could not have lived side by side. After the victory in the West, the necessity for crushing the Soviet Union was even more urgent, particularly in view of Britain's continued resistance after Dunkirk, for Hitler believed that Britain's hopes lay in Russia, as well as in the United States. His strategic reasons for attacking Russia were sound enough. He had no hope of eliminating America, but he believed that the defeat of Russia would so greatly increase the power of Japan in the Far East that America would have to devote all her military power to the confrontation in the Pacific, and would thus be unable to aid Britain.

Imperial Germany argued on much the same lines in 1917 prior to the despatch of the Zimmermann Telegram (see page 152). America subsequently proved that she was well able to fight a war on two fronts, and give a very good account of herself.

But the war on two fronts was contrary to all Wehrmacht thinking and had even been condemned in *Mein Kampf*, and so the invasion of Russia, with Britain undefeated in the West, was the ultimate military heresy.

However, after the fall of France, Hitler did not consider there was a front in the West, as his calculation of the forces needed to subdue the British clearly shows. Even when Sea Lion was abandoned, Hitler reckoned that Britain would not hold out for long. She was not a continental military power, and was therefore no threat to Germany. As Britain's hopes for survival lay in America, the destruction of Russia would frighten off Washington by putting Japan in a position of supremacy in the Pacific. Hitler calculated that a war on two fronts was heresy in the Pentagon too.

All this was sound strategic thinking but it contained a number of miscalculations, in which lay the seeds of ultimate disaster for Germany. War with Russia may have seemed to Hitler to be historically inevitable, yet it put him at an enormous military disadvantage; he was taking on the only power in the world which was capable of pinning down the bulk of the Wehrmacht on a single front.

The Battle of Britain (see page 163) was, or should have been seen as a grave warning, showing up as it did the fatal deficiencies

of the Luftwaffe. This lesson was completely lost on Hitler. He also miscalculated seriously over Italy's military capabilities, though he could hardly have foreseen the Italian military disasters in the Mediterranean.

In the summer of 1940 Hitler was at the summit of his power. The tremendous victory in the West had been accomplished with incredible speed and with a minimum of German casualties. He had complete ascendancy over his generals. He was in the same position as Napoleon before the march into Russia in 1812 – his army was prepared to follow him anywhere.

The Wehrmacht, basking in the glory of its great summer victory, were quite willing to take on Russia at Hitler's command, despite their previous doubts concerning the formidable quality of the Russian armour and mobile troops, and despite also having continually warned him of the danger of fighting Russia before the issue in the West was finally settled.

In the winter of 1940–41 the Wehrmacht stood at the pinnacle of its power, the greatest and most efficient fighting machine the world had ever seen. Victorious, confident, covered in martial glory, it was inevitable that it should turn to the East to meet the only opponent left in Europe.

After the fall of France there was no cut-and-dried plan for the invasion of Britain. Sea Lion was the product of the German General Staff during the months of rejoicing, and during that victorious summer Hitler was employing his genius on the more serious task of the invasion of Russia. He was prepared to undertake Sea Lion only if the most favourable circumstances prevailed – the defeat of the R.A.F. by the Luftwaffe and a serious decline in Britain's morale. Neither of these events were realized.

Hitler had decided upon the invasion of Russia after the brilliant performance of the Panzers in France. What could be done to the French army could be done to the Red Army.

On 29 July 1940 the decision was announced to members of the O.K.W. and the planning of it went forward with Teutonic efficiency. The summer and autumn of 1940 were taken up in preparing for Operation Barbarossa, which was so named in a directive of 18 December, when Hitler laid down the general grouping and the primary tasks of the forces which were to invade Russia.

In December there were thirty-four German divisions on the

Eastern front, and the task of the Wehrmacht during the early months of 1941 was to bring up the strength in the East to 120 divisions. During this time Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and this Balkan adventure served partly to camouflage the massing of the German divisions on the Russian front. So determined was the resistance in the Balkans however that the commencement of Operation Barbarossa had to be postponed for more than a month. Early in May, twenty-five of the best divisions of the Wehrmacht were occupied in stamping out resistance in the Balkans, and it was not until June that the most experienced and best trained of the German divisions were assembled on the Eastern front.

The effect of postponing Barbarossa in this way was incalculable. It was midsummer before the invasion was started, whereas it should have been launched in May. Many believe that Moscow was saved by the late start, and that the Panzers would not have become immobilized by the December snows in front of Moscow if they had started a month earlier.

The movements of the Wehrmacht divisions eastwards had not gone unnoticed in Moscow, where some alarm was being expressed in the Kremlin. Stalin never dreamed, apparently, what Hitler's true intentions were. He was uneasy at the prospect of the complete German occupation of the Balkans, particularly of Rumania where he himself had aspirations. He was also suspicious of German movements in Finland.

Stalin did not want to be forestalled in the grab for territory in Eastern Europe, and he asked that German troops should be withdrawn from those countries. In the meantime the Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, was attending a Berlin conference which had been called to discuss the sharing out of the British Empire, now considered in liquidation, between the Axis powers and Russia. Hitler of course had no intention of letting the Soviets have a share in the imperial loot. Nor had Japan.

The cravenness and gullibility of Stalin at this time is hard to credit. Winston Churchill knew what was going on between the Axis powers and Russia in Berlin, and it was with a splendid mixture of scorn and pleasure with which he greeted his new ally on 22 June 1941, when the Red Army was fleeing before the invading Panzers.

Stalin had had plenty of warning. In Tokyo the Communist spy Richard Sorge had become a close and trusted friend of the German Ambassador, Major General E. Ott, who confided everything to him and let him read (and secretly photograph) all the top secret German diplomatic papers. Sorge gave Stalin ample warning of them, which for some reason Stalin chose to disbelieve. A Swiss spy, Rudolph Roessler, known as "Lucy", and operating from Lucerne where it is believed that he was in touch with a traitor at Hitler's headquarters, thought by some to be Martin Bormann, also gave Stalin warning of the German attack of 22 June, and even provided details, which later proved to be quite correct, of the strategic objectives of the three main German army groups which were to make the attack.* Stalin, who perhaps shared Napoleon's contempt for spies, disregarded this warning also.

The German troop movements in Eastern Europe could hardly be concealed from the ubiquitous agents of the British Intelligence Service, who were still operating freely in the semi-neutral Balkan countries. The Joint Intelligence Committee in London became aware of the massing of German troops on their Russian front by 7 April, though it was not until early June that the J.I.C., which filters all intelligence reports for presentation to the necessary authorities, became certain that Hitler was intending to invade the Soviet Union.

However, Winston Churchill had his own methods of reading and digesting intelligence reports, and he became convinced by the end of March that Hitler intended to move against Russia. In April he instructed Sir Stafford Cripps, British Ambassador in Moscow, to warn Stalin, which he did through Vyshinsky. Churchill afterwards regretted that he had no direct contact with Stalin at that time. If he had, he believed he could have convinced him of the seriousness of the warnings.

However this could have been accomplished by releasing to the world's Press the facts known in high circles about Hitler's plans to invade Russia. This might have had the same sort of effect that the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram had in 1917. As it was, the secret information was kept secret, and the attack on Russia came as a surprise to the world at large, as well apparently as to Stalin.

*The stories of Sorge and Roessler are told fully in *Spies of the Twentieth Century* by Charles Franklin (Odhams, 1967).

Not only did the Russians ignore all warnings that their supposed ally was about to attack them, but they pretended that the Churchill warnings were founded upon wishful thinking. Ivan Maisky, who was Ambassador in London at that time, reflected complacency on the rumours "on which the West had been living for the preceding months".* The Russians believed, or pretended to believe, that what Britain really wanted was the destruction of the Soviet Union by the German army which would be spent and exhausted in the process, after which Britain would come to terms with a subdued Hitler.

These Soviet dreams in that pregnant spring of 1941 were comparable with the Nazi dreams of easy conquest in the East. It seems that few sane voices were raised in either Berlin or Moscow, but one at least was raised in Berlin. It was that of the Head of the German Foreign Office, an experienced and sagacious civil servant named Weizsacker, who told Ribbentrop that making war on Russia would only serve to encourage England which, he declared, was close to collapse. England had nothing to hope from a neutral Russia and much to gain from having her as an ally.

To this very sound advice, Weizsacker added another truth obvious to any student of Russia, though completely lost on the geniuses around the Führer. He told Ribbentrop that a victorious advance to Moscow and beyond would not bring Russia to her knees in view of the well-known passive resistance of the Slavs. Communism would merely re-establish itself in Eastern Russia and Siberia, and there would in fact be no end to the war. Weizsacker concluded his wise advice to his superiors by saying that a German attack on Russia would not only give England new moral strength, but would be interpreted by Britain as German uncertainty about the success of the fight against England. To fight Russia, he said, would be to greatly lengthen the war.

That everything Weizsacker said was true was proved by events. It was certainly fortunate for England that Hitler ignored his advice, in the same way as it was perhaps fortunate for Hitler that Stalin ignored the warning voices which told him of the coming attack. If the Russians had been ready, their air force would not have been practically destroyed on the ground. Right to the end Stalin apparently believed that the formidable German troop

**Memoirs of an Ambassador* by Ivan Maisky (Hutchinson 1967).

concentrations in the East were merely connected with the Balkan grab, and his suspicions of Germany were on account of his being forestalled over his own aggressive designs upon Rumania.

At daybreak on 22 June the Soviet daydream ended and the nightmare began, and only the far-sighted on that awful day thought that Hitler had made his greatest mistake.

At four o'clock on that morning the Russian Ambassador in Berlin received a formal declaration of war from Ribbentrop. At dawn the Stukas took off and the Panzers began to roll, as the triumphant conquerors of France moved forward, believing that the whole of Russia lay at their feet.

As the day broke in Moscow the German Ambassador appeared at the Kremlin demanding to see Molotov, who had already been roused from his bed by frantic reports from the distant western frontiers which told of massive German attacks. When the German Ambassador read to Molotov the declaration of war, Molotov, rather pathetically, said: "Your aircraft have just bombed some ten open villages. Do you believe that we deserved that?" The Russians were taken so completely by surprise that the German radio monitors intercepted the same message again and again: "We are being fired on. What shall we do?"

The Germans invaded Russia with 120 divisions, of which 17 were armoured and 12 motorized. Behind them a further 26 divisions were assembling for action, so that by July the Wehrmacht were about 150 divisions strong in the East. They were supported by about 2,700 operational aircraft. According to German estimates the Russian armies confronting them numbered 186 divisions, of which 119 were on the German front.

It was certainly true that the Red Army was taken largely by surprise. But Hitler's belief that it was unable to function efficiently because of the purges, the insidious effects of Communism, and the fear of the political commissars, was largely illusory. Such disatisfaction as existed in Russia was completely reversed by the inhumanities of the conquerors.

The Nazis' behaviour in Russia was an exercise in stupidity of such dimensions that it is difficult to believe that the authors of it were possessed of anything more than brute intelligence. There was much opposition to Stalin in 1941 which could have been effectively exploited by Germany when it conquered large

areas of Russia's richest and most prosperous regions. Instead, the bestial behaviour of the conquerors created a partisan army in their rear, which made a vital contribution to their eventful defeat.

So far as Britain was concerned, Russia was a difficult and thankless ally. They were uneasy war partners from the start. In view of Stalin's pact of friendship with Hitler it could hardly be otherwise. Stalin had not even used a long spoon during his sup with Hitler, and was as anxious as the Nazis to get his hands on some part of the supposedly defunct British Empire. In Churchill's private opinion Stalin got what he deserved on that fated 22 June.

For his part, Stalin was equally critical of his British allies, upon whom he immediately made demands which were impossible for Britain to fulfil. He accused Britain of letting the main burden of war fall upon the Soviet Union. When Russia demanded that Britain should open a second front in Europe in the autumn of 1941, Churchill acidly reminded Ivan Maisky that only four months previously Britain had stood alone against Germany, and at that time they did not know whether Russia would join the German side against Britain. He made it plain that he knew that Russia and Germany had been discussing the share-out of the British Empire just before the German invasion. Russia, of all countries, said Churchill, had no right to reproach Britain.

Churchill's scornful reminder that Britain did not know what side Russia had been on touched Maisky on the raw. He blamed the Soviet's double-dealing and opportunism of 1939–41 upon Chamberlain's sabotage of the proposed tripartite pact of mutual assistance between Britain, the U.S.S.R. and France. The true reason for Stalin's pact with Hitler was that the Kremlin had seen war in Europe as inevitable, and they wished to stand aloof until the two sides had exhausted themselves, when they would intervene. Thus would the cause of world revolution be better served.

During the summer of 1941 the Wehrmacht advanced triumphantly across the rich lands of Russia. On 22 August, with the Panzers only 180 miles from Moscow, Hitler struck at the Ukraine with overwhelming force, capturing Kiev on 26 September, where the Germans took nearly 700,000 prisoners. It seemed that nothing could stop them and the advance upon Moscow was continued. In the north they pressed on to encircle Leningrad. But during October bad weather set in, bogging down the Panzers in their

drive to the capital. The November cold was intense, and when the Germans actually came within sight of Moscow in December they encountered blizzards and arctic temperatures which made their positions impossible. The Russians then counter-attacked in conditions to which they were acclimatized, and the Wehrmacht were forced to retreat ninety miles.

By Christmas Hitler placed himself in personal command of the German army. It was the beginning of the end. America, as a consequence of the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December, was now in the war.

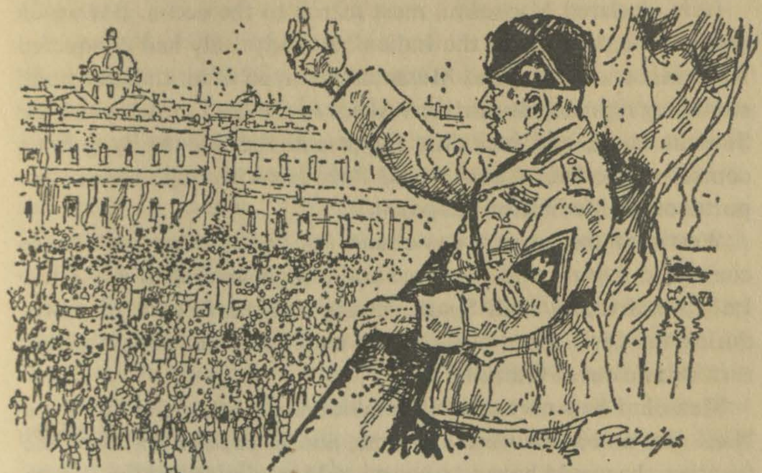
Although there were great victories to come – the Wehrmacht swept on to the oilfields of the Caucasus and the gates of Stalingrad – Germany found herself unequal to the task of subduing Russia, and her fate was thus sealed, for when Russia finally gathered her immense strength her armies were irresistible.

The blitzkrieg – the lightning war – died in Russia. The great myth petered out on the Russian plains and amid the endless snows, and with it died the myth of the invincibility of the German army.

Hitler seriously underestimated the resistance of the Russian people. He did not profit from Napoleon's lesson. In the same way he overestimated the power of the Wehrmacht to accomplish victory with enormously extended lines of communication. If victory was to be accomplished, the lines of communication should have been guarded by more than just guns. The brutal and inhuman policies adopted towards the conquered Russians endangered the exposed lines. Only in the North was any attempt made to enlist the help of the dissident element of the Communist régime. In the Nazi policy of enslaving the inferior Slavic races under the *herrenvolk* lay the seeds of ultimate disaster.

In Russia, as in the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe's lack of heavy bombers showed how faulty had been its planning. Although it was effective in close support of the army as a flying artillery, its long-range deficiencies were a great disadvantage in view of the immense distances involved.

Hitler's invasion of Russia ensured a totality of defeat which has enabled the conquering Allies to keep Germany divided between East and West; and Germany will remain divided as long as Russia has the power to keep her so, for their fear of Germany is a thing which Hitler has burnt into their very souls.



Mussolini and the Fourth Punic War

Mussolini's greatest moment of triumph was on 9 May 1936 when from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome he proclaimed to a delirious crowd that Ethiopia had been conquered and that the King of Italy was now the Emperor of Abyssinia.

Four years later, on 10 June 1940, when he declared war on France there were no cheering crowds. It was an unpopular decision. No one in Italy wanted to get into the war. It was undoubtedly Mussolini's greatest mistake, which led to endless suffering for Italy and his own ignominious downfall. He should have followed General Franco's prudent example and stayed neutral if he wanted his regime to remain in power. But the Duce believed that historical necessity was driving Italy into a war of survival. Franco was under no such illusions about the destinies of Spain.

It was Italy's geographical imprisonment in the Mediterranean, with Suez at one end and Gibraltar at the other, each controlled by Great Britain, which made it necessary, in Mussolini's opinion, for her to break out of her prison by force. The more populous

and powerful Italy became, he said, the more she would suffer from her Mediterranean imprisonment. The bars of this prison were Corsica, Tunisia, Malta and Cyprus.

Italy, declared Mussolini, must march to the ocean. But which ocean – the Atlantic or the Indian? Already Italy had conquered Abyssinia and Libya, and Mussolini dreamed of an Italian empire stretching right across northern Africa to the Gulf of Aden and the Somalia coast, and including Egypt and the Sudan. By gaining control of the Suez Canal would Italy break through the eastern portal of her Mediterranean prison.

Westward the enemy was France as well as Britain. France controlled Algeria and Morocco and a huge area of West Africa. Italy was friendly with Spain, having assisted Franco to power during the Civil War (1936–9), and anticipated that Spain would turn Britain out of Gibraltar.

Mussolini had no territorial ambitions in Europe, apart from Nice. Her ambitions were maritime, and to expand her maritime frontiers she would have to wage what Mussolini called the Fourth Punic War.* Speaking in February 1939 he said that Italy would be ready to wage this war by the end of 1942. By then all their artillery would have been renewed, they would have eight battleships and double the number of submarines then in service. Abyssinia would have been completely pacified, and they would by then have trained an army of native Africans to fight for them.

This engaging prospect was ruined by the war in Europe which began in September 1939, and by the summer of the following year had led to the utter defeat of France. This completely upset Mussolini's carefully thought-out timetable. He was faced with the probability of losing the spoils he had his eye upon.

In 1940, as he saw it, the war was over and done with. His German friends, rather than his African levies, had done the fighting. France was prostrate. England was humbled, about to sue for peace. Most of Europe, from the North Cape to the Pyrenees, belonged to Hitler. That was all right with Mussolini, so long as he got Nice, Corsica, Malta and Cyprus. But he would have to get into the war in order to sit at the peace table for the carve-up. As for Egypt, with Britain finished that would just

*The three previous Punic Wars were waged against Carthage by Ancient Rome between the years 268 and 146 B.C.

fall into his hands, together with the Sudan. The Fourth Punic War would in fact have been cheaply fought, and the Mussolini dream of the Roman Empire reborn after fifteen centuries would come true.

Mussolini could hardly be blamed for misjudging the course which events would take. Greater and more prescient men than he thought Britain, her Empire, and all she stood for was finished in 1940. And later Mussolini was of the opinion that he could have accomplished his dream had not the German Army marched to its death in Russia. Operation Barbarossa was madness in Mussolini's view, when there were easier spoils to grab in the rich and smiling Mediterranean.

But the rejoicing that went on in fascist Europe during the victorious summer of 1940, was not yet marred by the shadow of Russia. The weeping in France, in Poland, the Low Countries and Scandinavia was music to the conquerors. So for Mussolini the hour had struck. To have stayed out of the war would have been to deny everything that he stood for.

His countrymen did not share his enthusiasm, and the declaration of war on 10 June was intensely unpopular throughout Italy, not only among the ordinary people, but also in the army and the Fascist Party. The enthusiasm for Fascism had waned in Italy. The ageing and strutting Mussolini had little appeal to the younger generation.

There was much to be said for neutrality. Peace, prosperity and growing power would have been the lot of a neutral Italy, and with Hitler embroiled in Russia, Mussolini, who was in many ways a politically intelligent man, would have emerged later as a peace maker and gone down in Italian history as one of her great statesmen.

But Mussolini's genius did not lie in this direction. He was the man of action, the dynamic leader. To some extent Hitler had copied him and modelled himself upon him, and by 1940 he greatly overshadowed him, as Mussolini was well aware. Mussolini's 1942 war timetable had been completely upset by the tremendous successes of the Wehrmacht in Norway, the Low Countries and France.

There was no enthusiasm on the part of Hitler, for that matter, for Italy to enter the war. The Führer knew that Mussolini wanted

victory on the cheap. The war in the West was finished and the Italian action created both international bitterness as well as contempt. Italy was execrated throughout the world. "The hand that held the dagger has stuck it into the back of its neighbour," said President Roosevelt. "You will find the Germans are hard taskmasters," the French Ambassador told Ciano when he was handed the declaration of war.

The Italian army first attacked French positions on the Alpine front. Britain immediately seized five Italian ships at Gibraltar and dropped a few bombs on Turin and Milan. The Italians then moved an army of thirty-two divisions along the Riveria coast under Prince Umberto. But the French Alpine positions proved impregnable and the advance along the coast was halted at Mentone.

But Paris had already fallen and the French armies had collapsed under the force of German arms even before the Italians invaded France. On 17 June Marshal Pétain asked Hitler for an armistice and requested the cessation of hostilities from Italy.

Mussolini had got what he wanted, a seat at the conference table, but he soon discovered the truth of the French Ambassador's remark about the Germans being hard taskmasters.

Hitler had a preliminary meeting with Mussolini at Munich on 18 June, and Mussolini soon found out that Hitler's prior consideration was to get a working agreement with the Vichy government. The last thing Hitler wanted was a French government-in-exile set up in North Africa, and if France was pushed too hard, he was afraid that would happen. Another grave consideration was the future of the powerful French fleet. If Vichy was antagonized, the fleet might go over to the British, and that would be the worst thing that could happen from the point of view of either Germany or Italy, for it would alter the naval balance of the world. Hitler knew that a demand for the French fleet to be handed over to the Axis powers would meet with a flat refusal at Vichy and the almost certain possibility of a French government-in-exile in North Africa. The only solution was for the fleet to be immobilized.

Hitler of course accepted Mussolini's demands against France – the historic claims to Nice, Corsica and Tunis – but he had no intention of pressing them upon Vichy. Hitler wanted a settlement of his war in the West, so that he could turn his back upon it

and devote his energies to fighting Soviet Russia. He wanted no trouble from France and a compromise peace with England. He did not tell the Duce all this, of course.

Mussolini saw the point about the French fleet. That concerned him very closely. He finally agreed with Hitler that the Italian territorial demands upon France should be shelved until full peace negotiations were made. These demands therefore were not presented to Vichy by Germany in 1940, "in order to make it easier for France to accept the armistice conditions", which were humiliating enough as it was.

If Mussolini did not see the red light then, his son-in-law, Count Ciano, who was Foreign Minister certainly did when he presented the Italian demands to Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop looked at Ciano cynically and said: "One must be moderate and not have eyes bigger than one's stomach."

Although the Führer made it clear that he wanted to conclude a peace with England as soon as possible, and keep America out of the war at all costs, it was evident that the struggle was not going to terminate in a way so eminently satisfactory to the Axis. Britain and the Commonwealth were determined to fight on. Britain won the Battle of Britain. Operation Sea Lion was called off.

Whatever the Duce may have thought, his countrymen did not relish the prospect of fighting for the glory of the New Roman Empire. There was none of the blood of the ancient Legionaries in the Italians' veins, either metaphorically or lineally.

In 1940 Italy was both economically and militarily ill-equipped for war. She possessed no modern tanks or artillery. Her army had none of the striking power of the Wehrmacht, and none of the morale. The Italians had never been convinced that their cause was really worth fighting for, which was why they were anxious to surrender at the smallest reverse. The Italian army had lost much equipment in Ethiopia and Spain, and this had not been replaced. Her Air Force was not industrially supported and was greatly inferior both in training, performance and equipment to that of other combatant European countries. Her anti-aircraft defences in 1940 comprised two searchlights and 230 anti-aircraft batteries. Her best arm was the Navy, which was modern and well equipped. But it had never been in action, and its oil had to be imported either through Suez or Gibraltar.

On 10 June 1940 Italy took a chance "which comes only once in five thousand years", as Ciano put it. Her two great rivals, Britain and France, were on their knees and appeared to be out for the count. All the same, Italy went to war in a state of military and economic weakness.

In his gamble, Mussolini was forced to depend on Hitler for economic help, particularly in raw materials. This was an additional burden on Germany which Hitler did not relish, though the prospect in that intoxicating summer of 1940 seemed bright enough to make it light to bear.

Demands were made on Italy which caused a great deal of anti-German feeling. Hitler particularly wanted Italian workers in German factories and by 1941 as many as 300,000 had been sent. Conditions in the German factories were notoriously bad, and the Nazis looked upon the Italians as being racially inferior. Many Communists had been forced to go to Germany to work, and this resulted in trouble, followed by brutal punishments. When Italian workers were treated in the same way as Polish forced labourers, there was trouble in Italy. Complaints from Rome to Berlin resulted in Germany agreeing that recalcitrant Italians should be sent back to Italy for punishment.

All the same, many incidents caused friction. There was, for instance, the case of a German woman in the Ruhr who had her hair cut off and her face smothered with tar because she had been seduced by an Italian. She would not have been so punished if the man had been a so-called Ayran type, even if he'd been a British prisoner-of-war. Mussolini was furious when he heard this and the Germans denied the incident in vain.

Mussolini had always been anxious to prove that the valiance of the Roman soldier had not declined throughout the centuries. The Italian army's conquest of Ethiopia was hardly counted a resounding feat of arms. No one could say that the spears and ancient rifles of the ragged armies of Haile Selassie were a test of the fighting qualities of a modern army equipped with tanks, machine-guns, fighter-bombers and mustard gas.

In the Second World War, in which he played such an inglorious part, Mussolini had an early but somewhat hollow success in August 1940 when a powerful Italian force based in Ethiopia successfully invaded and occupied British Somaliland,

which had been practically denuded of British troops owing to the war situation.

It was essential to give more positive evidence of the valour and effectiveness of Italian arms, especially in view of the obstinate reluctance of the British to realize they were defeated. On 27 October Mussolini sent an ultimatum to Athens announcing that Italy proposed to occupy certain key positions in Greece to prevent Britain using them as naval and air bases.

Hitler did not approve of the Greek campaign and tried to stop it, but it was too late. The invasion started on the 28th and Mussolini, anxious to impress the Führer with a demonstration of Italian might, assured him that Greece would be crushed in a few days. The invasion was a miserable failure. The ragged, ill-equipped Greek army put up a tremendous resistance and drove the Italians into Albania, where they were later rescued by the Wehrmacht when it invaded the Balkans early in 1941.

German intervention in the Balkans was the last thing Mussolini wanted, as he regarded it as his sphere of influence. But with the Italian army exposed to the ridicule of the world by its futile performance against the heroic little Greek army, he had no option but to accept combined military operations with the Germans. There was no other way, in fact, of winning a single battle.

Mussolini's largest army was in Africa where he had 300,000 troops in Libya and 200,000 in Ethiopia. Facing Mussolini's huge Libyan army Britain had a mere 36,000 men in Egypt, which included three battalions of infantry, one battalion of tanks and two squadrons of armoured cars. Mussolini's forces thus outnumbered his opponents by nearly ten to one. Egypt was an important item on his list of intended conquests, and it was indeed a prize with the possession of the Suez Canal as the key to the East.

Egypt was technically an independent and neutral country throughout the war. Britain had had bases in Egypt since the nineteenth century and talk of relinquishing them in the nineteen-thirties came to nothing with the rise of the Axis powers. When war came in September 1939, a British official told King Farouk firmly but respectfully that British control of Egypt must be retained until the defeat of Germany.

"Oh, all right," Farouk replied sulkily. "But when it's all over, for God's sake lay down the white man's burden and go!"

Despite this official attitude, Egypt was careful to maintain her neutrality throughout the war, and as a result reaped a handsome reward of £500,000,000 in sterling balances. Cairo ruling circles relished Italian occupation even less than British.

In September 1940 Mussolini visited his headquarters in Africa with a great blare of trumpets, and was hailed as the all-conquering Caesar, after which Marshal Graziani launched his main attack across the Libyan desert. The advance ended at Sidi Barrani, seventy miles inside the Egyptian frontier, and there Graziani's army, mainly owing to supply difficulties, was stuck until December, when it was smashed and thrown into headlong retreat by a British counter-attack.

The double fiasco of Greece and Egypt put paid to Italy's illusions of an easy war and rich spoils. Mussolini was bitterly disappointed at the dismal performance of his troops, whose disinclination to fight, due to lack of a cause rather than lack of courage, was demonstrated to the whole world in the most humiliating way. If the Italians had been fighting for their homeland, or for something they believed in, they would have fought very differently.

The result sealed the fate of Mussolini, for the Italians increasingly turned against him, and made him realize the enormity of his mistake in entering the war, a mistake which General Franco of Spain was very careful not to repeat, with the result that he survives in power to this day while all his warlike fascist contemporaries have gone down in the dust of defeat.

It was at the beginning of 1941 that the bitterness set in. Hitler, now planning his attack on Russia, decided he could not risk dangers in his rear, so he sent the Afrika Korps under Rommel to Libya, together with Luftwaffe squadrons which were based on Sicily.

The arrival of the Germans altered the whole balance of power in the Mediterranean. The occupation of Yugoslavia, Greece and Crete greatly alarmed Britain who feared German designs on Egypt and the Middle East. But Hitler never took this theatre of war seriously. His concern was always Russia; *lebensraum* was in the rich Soviet lands, not on the shores of the Mediterranean. It was necessary to rescue Mussolini, to neutralize the Balkans and to camouflage the heavy movement of troops to the Russian

front, so that Barbarossa should take the Russians by surprise.

For Mussolini the result was Italian subserviance to Germany with nothing to show in the way of conquest. When Hitler attacked Russia, Mussolini saw it as the end of any major German military help for him in the Mediterranean. The Afrika Korps, though spectacular and brilliantly led by Rommel, was only a sparkling German side-show. It was never supported sufficiently by Germany for it to conquer Egypt, and it was finally left to its fate when caught between a heavily reinforced Eighth Army under Montgomery and Eisenhower's American army which landed on the North African coast in its rear towards the end of 1942.

In East Africa Britain not only re-occupied British Somaliland, but ousted Italy from every one of her colonial possessions – Eritrea, Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland. The Italian armies, cut off from all supplies and contact with Italy, surrendered wholesale. Haile Selassie was restored to his ancient throne, and the Suez Canal was secured from southern attack.

For Mussolini this was disaster. Not only had he lost a large army and a great deal of well-nigh irreplaceable equipment, but the dream of an African Empire upon which all his policies were based had vanished, for as soon as the colonies passed out of Italian hands all Italian identity in East Africa disappeared.

Mussolini was bitterly disappointed at the way the Germans let him down. Hitler's military strategy was purely continental, and he was quite unable to comprehend the decisive importance of the Mediterranean theatre. At the end of 1940, when Graziani was stuck at Sidi Barrani with supply difficulties and shortage of equipment, Mussolini appealed to Hitler for tanks and armoured equipment to enable the Italian troops to undertake a rapid offensive which, the Duce was convinced, would have taken Egypt. But his request was refused, despite the fact that during the second half of 1940 and the first quarter of 1941, the highly equipped German army was not engaged in any important theatre of war.

All the hopes of a cheap triumph which Mussolini had entertained in 1940 had now faded. His idea had been to secure conquests for Italy in Africa and the Mediterranean which would counterbalance the overwhelming supremacy of Germany in Europe. These hopes died in the sands of North Africa, while in East Africa the Italian flag had been entirely expunged. In Greece

he had the mortification of having to be rescued by Hitler from the hands of a ragged little army. Hitler's invasion of Russia shattered every hope of a quick victory and changed the whole face of the war.

In June 1941 Hitler was talking about the German armies, having annihilated Russia, striking down through Turkey to smash British power in the Middle East and then making a Napoleonic rendezvous with Rommel's Afrika Korps and the Italians in Egypt. Mussolini could not find much enthusiasm for such a German-dominated victory in the Mediterranean, and when the Blitzkrieg ground to a halt in the Russian snows, and the myth of its invincibility was destroyed for ever by the Red Army, Mussolini's despondency was mixed with a certain satisfaction at the discovery that the Germans too were fallible and could lose battles.

When the United States entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Mussolini had to admit reluctantly that it was after all going to last a long time – at least four years. The chances of any Italian victory receded with the prospect of strong Anglo-American action in the Mediterranean.

1942 was the year when it became plain even to the Germans that they could not win. In Russia the turning point was Stalingrad, in Africa El Alamein, in the Pacific the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway Island. The tide had turned. The Allies now took the initiative. France recovered from her defeatist torpor and the Resistance movement grew under Jean Moulin, France's bravest and greatest war leader. The Allies landed in North Africa.

As the war progressed and their military position worsened, the German and Italian allies grew farther apart in an atmosphere of bitterness and resentment. In Italy there was intense anti-German feeling. To the Italians, the only reason for being in the war had been the quick achievement of their "historic" aims in the Mediterranean and Africa, as a kind of aftermath of the German victory in western Europe. With the lengthening of the war and the recession of any chance of victory, utter disillusion set in. Resentment of Germany arose largely from the insensitive way the Reich treated Italy's war aims, and the fact that Italy was not treated as an equal partner and was dependent upon Germany both militarily and economically. The result in Italy was a sharp increase in criticism of the fascist regime and a decline of Musso-

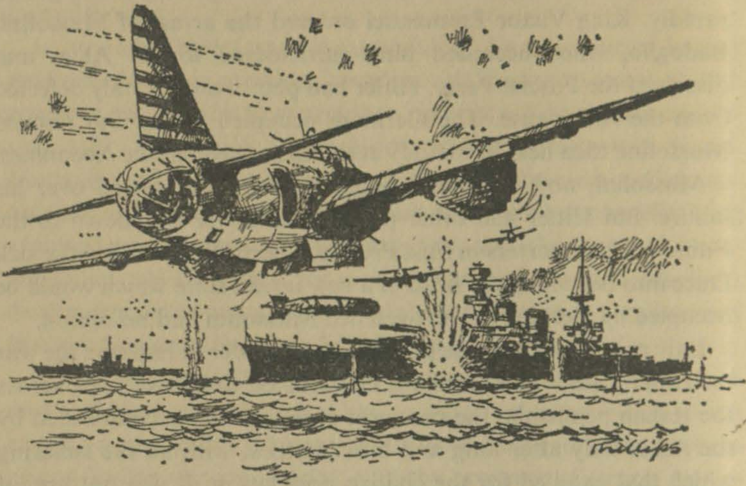
lini's popularity and prestige. Serious industrial trouble prompted by the Communist Party broke out in Turin and Milan.

In July 1943 the Allied armies landed in Sicily. Italy disintegrated rapidly. King Victor Emmanuel ordered the arrest of Mussolini. Badoglio, who succeeded him, surrendered to the Allies and dissolved the Fascist Party. Hitler had plans ready if Italy defected from the Axis cause. The Germans occupied Rome and rescued Mussolini, then held in custody at the Gran Sasso in the Apennines.

Mussolini, now ill, only wanted to retire and brood over his failure. But Hitler had other plans for him. He was flown to the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia, where Hitler bullied the sick Duce into becoming the head of a new fascist state which would be occupied by Germany. The wretched Mussolini had no option.

Italy now paid a terrible price for the blunder of entering the war on Hitler's side. The Germans constructed defensive lines across the Italian peninsula, the conquest of which was accomplished by the Allies only after long and bitter battles, with all the suffering which that entailed for the civilian population. It was not until 4 June 1944 that the Allies entered Rome, and the German front in Italy was not finally broken until April 1945.

On the 28th of that month, Mussolini, now little more than a bandit chief with a price on his head, was caught by some Communist partisans and shot, together with his mistress, Clara Petacci, near Messagra on Lake Como.



The Battleships that went East

The death knell of the battleship began to sound during the First World War. After centuries of supremacy upon the seas, these massive ships of war, with their tremendous fire power and armed might, encountered an enemy which, undetected, could strike the great ship a mortal blow. This was the submarine. At the Battle of Jutland – the last full-dress encounter between opposing battle fleets – the respective admirals were more afraid of each other's submarines than of each other's battleships.

But it was the aeroplane which really finished the battleship and made it obsolete as a weapon of war. It took a long time to die, and during the Second World War battleships were used extensively by both sides, particularly by Britain for convoy defence. The Germans used battleships of various kinds as surface raiders, and both the United States and Japan used them extensively in the Pacific war. But they became increasingly vulnerable and were a handicap in seaborne operations. The aircraft carrier took the battleship's place, and is itself now obsolete.

The battleship had to keep out of range of enemy aircraft or

operate under fighter cover. During the Normandy invasion of 1944 British battleships were used as offshore artillery, bombarding German positions with their big guns until their seams fell apart. It was realized then that their first port of call at the war's end would be the breaker's yard, and they were expendable.

The most dramatic and disastrous demonstration of the obsolescence of the battleship was the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* off the coast of Malaya by waves of Japanese bombers on 10 December 1941.

These two capital ships had been despatched to the Far East for the express purpose of deterring the Japanese who were threatening south-east Asia. This unsuitable and ill-balanced naval force was sent out by the War Cabinet in the teeth of opposition from the Admiralty, who had a better appreciation of the operational defects and limitations of both ships.

If the despatch of the ships was a mistake, the strategy of the Admiral in command, though somewhat in the Nelson tradition, made disaster certain. Admiral Sir Tom Phillips went down with his ship, together with 600 of his men. He was a brave and valued officer who took a risk which might have come off.

The *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* represented respectively the newest and the oldest capital ships in the Royal Navy. The *Prince of Wales* was a *King George V* class battleship of 35,000 tons displacement and was completed in 1941. It had ten 14-inch guns of new design and a secondary dual-purpose armament of sixteen 5.25-inch high-angle and low-angle guns. Its speed was 28½ knots. It was a formidable, well-armed capital ship.

The *Repulse* was a battle-cruiser, one of two ships built in 1916 as a result of the success of the battle-cruisers *Invincible* and *Inflexible* in the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914 – a rather overpraised success, for the British ships, despite overwhelming superiority, had suffered greatly from the extreme accuracy of the gunfire of the smaller German ships. The faults of British battle-cruiser design were shown up at the Battle of Jutland when the *Invincible* was one of three battle-cruisers which blew up when hit by heavy shells.

The *Repulse* had a displacement of 32,000 tons, a speed of 29 knots and was armed with six 15-inch guns, twelve 4-inch and eight 4-inch high-angle guns. It had not received the extensive

modernization which her sister ship the *Renown* underwent in 1936–9, and was thus at a great disadvantage *vis-á-vis* the modern capital ships of the German and Japanese navies.

The *Prince of Wales* had considerable teething troubles, particularly with its new-type 14-inch guns, which signally failed her at the Battle of the Denmark Strait on 24 May 1941, when in company with the *Hood* she encountered the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen.*

The *Hood,* of 42,000 tons, was Britain's most famous battle-cruiser, and had long been the pride of the British fleet. But seven minutes after the battle began it blew up in exactly the same way as the British battle-cruisers did at Jutland, twenty-five years previously, which suggests that important lessons had not been learned at the Admiralty.

The *Prince of Wales* went into action against the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* with one of her 14-inch forward guns out of action owing to a defect, and, as the First Sea Lord said afterwards, "it was like fighting with one hand only, when it had got two".

It is believed that the *Hood* blew up when one or more high-velocity armour-piercing shells from the *Bismarck* penetrated into one of the main magazines. The *Prince of Wales* had to alter course to avoid her wreckage and only three of her company of 1,419 survived.

Two minutes after the *Hood* went down the *Prince of Wales* was heavily damaged by the gunfire of the German ships, and broke off the engagement. She made for Iceland, leaving the pursuit and the final destruction of the *Bismarck* to other units of the British fleet. So many British capital ships were engaged in this task that they could hardly fail to sink the *Bismarck*. It could not be said that the Royal Navy covered itself with glory on that occasion. The Battle of the Denmark Strait showed that German gunnery was superior, as it had been in the First World War.*

The elderly *Repulse* had not been blooded as the *Prince of Wales* had been. She had spent the first two years of the war on fleet and convoy duties and had taken part in the Norwegian campaign. It was also in the *Bismarck* operation, though it played only an insignificant part in the massive fleet movement which led to the sinking of the great German battleship. In July 1941 Winston Churchill sailed across the Atlantic in the *Prince of Wales* to

* See *The War at Sea 1939-1945* (Vol. I, p. 404) H.M. Stationery Office, 1954.

Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, for his historic meeting with President Roosevelt when the two statesmen signed the Atlantic Charter. It is worth noting that a trip like this in a new ship upsets its internal efficiency as well as its fighting trim.

During that summer and autumn the Japanese were hastening their preparations for war, and their plans to grab the rich colonial possessions of Britain, France and Holland in the Far East – Malaya, Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies. Their troops were already in Indo-China by agreement with the Vichy government, who had little choice in the matter. By July 1941 these forces had swelled to such proportions that it seemed that an invasion of Malaya and Thailand was imminent. In reply, the British and American governments applied economic sanctions and froze Japanese assets. This had the immediate effect of making the Japanese Navy use its reserves of oil.

Churchill was anxious to confront the Japanese in the Far East with what he termed a "deterrent squadron" of the British Navy, in the hope that this would dissuade her from attacking Malaya. He proposed sending one of the new *King George V* class battleships, of which three were then in service, together with a battle-cruiser and an aircraft carrier.

The Admiralty, however, said that none of the *KGV* battleships could be spared from the Atlantic, which was the most important theatre of war, particularly in view of the continuing threat of the *Tirpitz*. The Admiralty's Far East plans envisaged the despatch of four old *Royal Sovereign* class battleships to the Indian Ocean to protect the trade routes, and then to reinforce them in December or January of the following year with the *Nelson*, *Rodney*, *Renown* and two aircraft carriers; the fleet to be based on Ceylon.

Churchill did not agree to sending the old "R" class battleships to be exposed to modern Japanese raiders in the lonely reaches of the Indian Ocean. They were built during the First World War and were unmodernized. In their present state, he said, these old ships would be floating coffins. He insisted on a fast, modern force to be based forward at Singapore.

The Prime Minister strongly disagreed with what was fundamentally a defensive naval policy. Churchill, characteristically, wanted an offensive force, and the argument between 10 Downing Street and the Admiralty proceeded briskly.

The Admiralty was adamant. The two points of view were irreconcilable and the matter was dropped until October when Churchill brought it up again at a meeting of the Defence Committee, repeating his previous arguments. The First Lord, Mr A. V. Alexander, reiterated the Admiralty's objections to the *Prince of Wales* being sent East. The Foreign Office supported the Prime Minister, saying that the arrival of one of Britain's latest *KGV* battleships in Eastern waters would have a far greater political effect upon Japan than the presence of four old battleships built in the last war and no longer capable of fleet action.

The Admiralty found themselves in a minority in the Defence Committee, who were in favour of the Churchill plan, and the matter was discussed again three days later (20 October) by the Chiefs of Staff under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir A. Dudley P. R. Pound, stated the Admiralty's objections in full. He did not think that the presence of one fast modern battleship based on Singapore would deter the Japanese from moving south. But the presence of the *Nelson* and *Rodney* and the four *Royal Sovereigns* would force them to detach the major part of their fleet, and thus expose themselves to the American navy.

This argument obviously depended upon the active assistance of America, should Japan attack Malaya. This was six weeks before Pearl Harbour, and no one could be sure that the United States would go to war if Japan attacked Britain in the East. In fact, despite the sympathy for Britain in America, everything suggested that they would prefer to remain neutral. Churchill still believed that Japan was hesitating, and had no intention of attempting the conquest of Malaya. What he feared was raids by their powerful warships on our trade routes, against which the *Royal Sovereigns* would be useless. The Foreign Office agreed with the Prime Minister, and re-stated its argument about the political effect of sending out the *Prince of Wales*.

In view of the opposition, the First Sea Lord was bound to yield, and it was agreed to send the *Prince of Wales*, the *Repulse*, the aircraft carrier *Indomitable* and four destroyers. The *Indomitable*, however, was temporarily out of action through an accidental grounding, and it was decided, perhaps rashly, to send the two capital ships without the carrier which could provide them with

air cover. Churchill considered that the political situation in the Far East was so urgent that the risk must be taken.

Informing the Commonwealth Prime Ministers of the proposed naval dispositions in the Far East, he said: "In order further to deter Japan, we are sending forthwith our newest battleship, *Prince of Wales*, to join *Repulse* in the Indian Ocean. This is done in spite of protests from the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, and is a serious risk for us to run."

Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, was placed in command of the squadron, and the *Prince of Wales* left home waters on 25 October flying Admiral Phillips' flag. At Capetown Admiral Phillips met Field Marshal Smuts, the South African Prime Minister, who, according to Phillips, said that he agreed with the policy of sending the two capital ships to Singapore as a deterrent against further Japanese aggression. Furthermore, Smuts thought that as much publicity as possible should be given to the move. The arrival of the *Prince of Wales* at Capetown was hardly likely to escape the notice of the enemy in any case.

All the same, Smuts expressed concern to Churchill a day or two later about the division of Allied naval strength between Hawaii and Singapore – "two fleets each separately inferior to the Japanese Navy". He thought that there was an opening here for a first class disaster if the Japanese were "really nippy".

Smuts was not necessarily disagreeing with the Churchill policy of despatching the *Prince of Wales* to the Far East, though he was jumping the gun a little in assuming that both America and Britain would be fighting Japan. Pearl Harbour was still nineteen days away, and as it came as a surprise to Hitler it is not likely that Smuts had foreknowledge of Tokyo's intentions.

The *Repulse*, under the command of Captain W. G. Tennant, was already at Colombo when the *Prince of Wales* arrived there on 28 November. Admiral Phillips then received orders to fly on to Singapore ahead of his flagship and then to Manila in order to co-ordinate plans with the Dominion, Allied and American navies.

The eastern scene was already dark with war clouds during those November days. Japan was resolved on aggression. Admiral Yamomoto was at sea with his task-force of thirty-one warships awaiting the right moment to strike at Pearl Harbour. Had Churchill known this, he would have realized the futility of at-

tempting to deter Japan by sending one of Britain's crack warships to the scene, and would have conceded that the Admiralty had been right all along.

It is possible that Admiral Phillips still had his doubts about the advisability of his mission. Certainly the Admiralty had. They were extremely anxious about the exposed position of Phillips' unprotected squadron and suggested to him on 1 December that the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* should leave Singapore. They should either take shelter in Darwin or among the innumerable islands of the East Indian archipelago. Admiral Phillips flew to Manila to discuss joint action with General MacArthur and Admiral Hart, C. in C. of the United States Asiatic Fleet.

On 6 December they heard news of a large Japanese invasion fleet in the Gulf of Siam. On the morning of 7 December, Yamomoto's bombers struck at Pearl Harbour. America was in the war. "We are all in the same boat now," President Roosevelt said on the phone to Winston Churchill, who did not conceal his pleasure, for he had not heard then of the extent of the American losses at Pearl Harbour.

The Japanese blow at Pearl Harbour completely changed the strategic balance of naval power in the Pacific, if not in the world. Within half an hour the American battle fleet was annihilated. Four battleships, the *Arizona*, the *Oklahoma*, the *California* and the *West Virginia* were totally lost, and every other battleship – except one which was in dry dock – heavily damaged; 2,000 Americans were killed and nearly 2,000 others injured.

Thus American naval power in the Pacific was temporarily demolished, and the mastery of the eastern seas passed into Japanese hands. Although this momentous event brought to Britain's side a powerful war ally, the one she most desired to have, it was a grim moment in history.

In London the War Cabinet were trying to measure the consequences of what had happened. One thing was plain: Britain had lost command of every ocean except the Atlantic. Malaya, Australia, New Zealand, as well as the Dutch East Indies were wide open to attack. How real had been British naval power in the Far East during the twentieth century is a matter of doubt. It was not realized, even in 1941, that air power was of greater importance.

The *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* were at Singapore, the

former a powerful modern battleship, the latter old, speedy, heavily gunned though lightly armoured, and very vulnerable – as were all the British battle-cruisers. The War Cabinet considered it had a powerful weapon in its hand at a vital spot and at the right time, even though the all-important aircraft carrier had not yet been able to join them.

The War Cabinet on 9 December discussed long and earnestly what they should do with the two ships. Obviously they should put to sea and vanish in the islands. Should they remain in the area to protect Australasia, or should they be sent to join the depleted American fleet in a splendidly Churchillian gesture of allied co-operation and solidarity? The fact that the United States, before Pearl Harbour, had steadfastly refused even to let their fleet make a friendly call at Singapore "by accident", dampened the enthusiasm of the War Cabinet to present America with a valuable *KGV* at a time when the United States Navy was being hastily withdrawn from the Atlantic and transferred to the Pacific. The War Cabinet decided to sleep on the problem which, while they were in bed, was resolved for them in the East in the most disastrous manner.

The *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* had reached Singapore on 2 December. On the 5th Admiral Phillips flew to Manila for his discussions with General MacArthur and Admiral Hart. He returned to Singapore on the morning of the 7th to receive news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Just after midnight on the 8th the Japanese invasion of Malaya began.

What was the Admiral to do?

It is easy to say in the light of what happened that the wise and prudent thing would have been for him to have taken his two valuable capital ships to sea and cautiously awaited events and instructions from the Admiralty. Obviously the correct strategy was to withdraw naval forces from an area where the enemy was in complete maritime control. Equally obviously such a course of events at the time was unthinkable. The cardinal mistake lay in the War Cabinet, at the Prime Minister's insistence, sending out capital ships unprotected by carrier-borne fighters. Having been sent there, Admiral Phillips could not abandon the British land and air forces in Malaya now under intensive Japanese attack. No naval commander worth the name would have considered such a course.

There was also a large civilian population to be protected. Admiral Phillips made the right decision. The mistake was not his.

He decided to strike at the invading Japanese army while they were disembarking. He judged that, given good fighter support from our forward airfields, he could achieve surprise which would offset his own considerable disadvantage of being without an aircraft carrier. He requested air reconnaissance a hundred miles north of his course and fighter cover over the scene of his intended operation off Singora in the Gulf of Siam where the Japanese were disembarking their troops.

He sailed from Singapore on the evening of the 8th with the *Prince of Wales*, the *Repulse* and four destroyers, *Electra*, *Express*, *Tenedos* and *Vampire*.

What was not known when the squadron sailed was that the northern airfields were already untenable and had been abandoned. This information was passed to the *Prince of Wales* in the early hours of the 9th. Even though this meant that he would not have fighter protection at Singora, Admiral Phillips decided to continue. He also received warning of strong Japanese bomber forces now stationed in southern Indo-China.

This considerably altered the situation. But, despite the warning of Pearl Harbour, the Admiral decided to continue and press his element of surprise. Undoubtedly if he could have reached Singora without being spotted he could have done enormous damage to the Japanese landing force with his heavy ships which would have arrived off Singora at dawn on the 10th. He judged it a risk worth taking.

However, on the afternoon of the 9th three Japanese naval aircraft were sighted from the *Prince of Wales*. Reluctantly Admiral Phillips then abandoned the enterprise and turned his ships on a reverse course back to Singapore.

Just before midnight a message was received by the *Prince of Wales* from Singapore which read: "Enemy reported landing Kuantan, latitude 3° 50' North". The message gave no indication of the reliability of the report.

Kuantan was on the Malayan coast approximately 200 miles from Admiral Phillips' position at midnight when he received the message. It was in a south-westerly direction and was not far off his course to Singapore.

An urgent conference took place in the Admiral's staff cabin. The extreme gravity of this news for Singapore was not lost on the Admiral. A successful enemy landing at Kuantan would mean that the Japanese could cut the main line of communication running through the Malay Peninsula. Admiral Phillips assumed that Singapore would know what importance he would place upon the message, in view of Kuantan's strategic position, and would expect him to go there and intercept the landing force during the critical period of disembarkation. Phillips assumed therefore that Singapore would provide him with fighter cover when he arrived.

At 12.50 a.m. Admiral Phillips altered course to Kuantan. He maintained wireless silence, which was essential if he was to conceal his position and intentions from the listening enemy. His action was later criticized on the ground that it demanded too high a degree of insight from the staff officers at Singapore. He should not perhaps have expected from them the same strategic subtleties as he was used to at the Admiralty. As it was, Singapore took no action to anticipate the arrival of the squadron off Kuantan. Apparently no aircraft were sent out.

During the night the 22nd Japanese Air Flotilla were making intensive plans to attack the British squadron. They had been loading bombs for an attack on Singapore, and they immediately changed them for torpedoes. A Japanese submarine had reported the British ships steering north at 2 p.m. on the 9th. There is no Japanese record of their having been sighted from the air on that day.

Throughout the night Japanese bombers searched in vain for the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, which were now away to the west bearing down on the Malayan coast. In the early hours of the 10th they were sighted by a Japanese submarine which fired its torpedoes, all of which missed. The submarine then reported the British ships to be on a southerly course.

At dawn a reconnaissance force of nine Japanese aircraft took off from Saigon, followed an hour later by a striking force of eighty-four bombers and torpedo bombers flying in squadrons of nine. At the same time Admiral Phillips arrived off Kuantan – to find no landing taking place. The report in fact had been false. But there had been no amending message from Singapore so the Admiral sent the destroyer *Express* to the harbour where there was

no sign of the enemy. The Admiral then turned his squadron south towards Singapore.

Meanwhile the Japanese striking force had failed to find its quarry on his southward run which went nearly to the latitude of Singapore before it returned. Its homeward run led it quite by chance across the path of the British squadron.

At 10.20 an enemy reconnaissance plane was sighted by the *Prince of Wales* and soon after eleven the attacks began. First came high-level bombers, then torpedo bombers, attacking in successive waves and with deadly accuracy.

The *Repulse* was hit first, by a bomb which started a fire. This was successfully brought under control. The first flight of torpedo bombers scored two hits on the *Prince of Wales*, causing serious damage. The second attack was made on the *Repulse* which took successful evading action and was not hit. The ships had become separated and Captain Tennant, after sending an emergency message to Singapore, took the *Repulse* towards the flagship and tried to assist her. She seemed out of control.

It was now past noon, and another heavy attack was developing. The *Repulse* was struck by three torpedoes and the *Prince of Wales* by four. The *Repulse* heeled over at thirty degrees and Captain Tennant realized that his ship was doomed. He ordered all hands on deck, a fact which doubtless saved many lives.

From his bridge Captain Tennant looked down upon the decks of his stricken ship where hundreds of men were collecting on the starboard side without the slightest sign of panic. Seizing the loud-hailer, Captain Tennant told them how well they had fought and he wished them good luck. The *Repulse* heeled over to port and sank at 12.33. The destroyers picked up 796 survivors, including Captain Tennant.

The *Prince of Wales* in the meantime continued under the relentless attack of the torpedo bombers and received several more hits. She struggled slowly northwards, listing heavily to port and settling in the water. It was plain to the attendant destroyers that she too was doomed. At 1.20 she suddenly heeled over and sank. The destroyers rescued 1,285 of her complement of 1,612. Admiral Phillips was not among the survivors.

R.A.F. fighters had been sent out from Singapore as soon as Captain Tennant's emergency message was received, and they

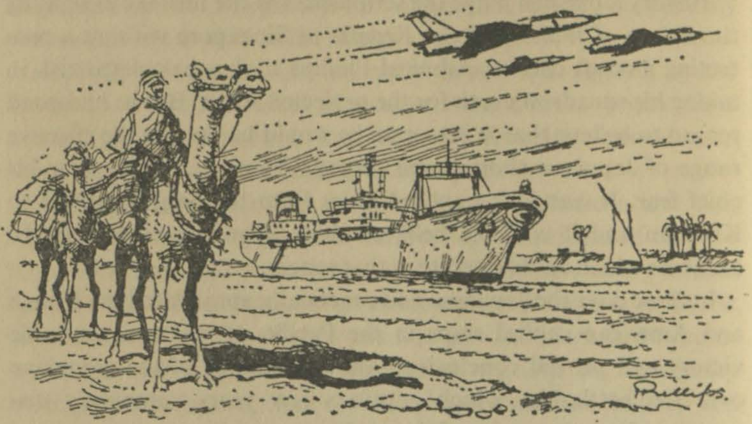
arrived over the scene in time to see the *Prince of Wales* go down.

The loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* was a stunning blow to Britain. "In all the war," wrote Winston Churchill, "I have never received a more direct shock."*

History alone can judge the seriousness of the mistake of sending the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* to Singapore without a protecting aircraft carrier. Admiral Phillips took a calculated risk in taking his squadron north for the projected strike. But he had good reason to believe that at Kuantan he would be outside the effective range of Japanese shore-based torpedo bombers, which were his chief fear. It was four hundred miles from the Saigon airbase to Kuantan and it was not believed that Japan possessed torpedo bombers which could operate at that range.

In three days the Japanese had practically annihilated the British and American capital ships in the Pacific. It was a remarkable victory and proved conclusively the ascendancy of the aeroplane over the battleship, which within a few years completely disappeared from the navies of the world.

**The Second World War*, Vol. III, p. 551.



Suez, 1956

There is general agreement that Anthony Eden's Suez adventure was a British blunder of the first magnitude.

Since that event Britain's relations with Egypt and the new countries developing from the old colonial territories have been of the worst. But it must be said that even if Suez had not taken place, it is doubtful whether they would be much better. President Nasser had no intention of being on good terms with Britain. He could only lead the Arab world by being violently anti-British. Suez played into his hands and added plenty of fuel to the fire.

The Anglo-French attack on Egypt in 1956 united the Arab countries and poisoned their relations with Britain, a matter of some importance in view of the fact that she depends on the Middle East for oil and still has important defence and imperial interests in the Arab world.

Many people think that the mistake in 1956 was that Britain and France did not continue until the Suez Canal was firmly in their hands and Nasser ousted from power. The more general view, however – and certainly the view of the world at large –

is that the attack on Egypt was morally wrong and indefensible.

Britain's relations with Egypt deteriorated during the Second World War when the country was used as a British military base. King Farouk was told that British control of Egypt must be maintained until Germany was defeated, and his reply, as we have seen on page 193, made it plain that Egypt looked forward to the day. But Britain did not go at the end of the war.

The forcible creation of the state of Israel in 1948 increased the Arab distrust of the western powers and created a highly charged political situation in the eastern Mediterranean. All the Middle Eastern states became strongly nationalistic, and in Africa there was the "wind of change". The long-drawn-out Algerian revolt began in 1954, and was strongly supported by Egypt.

British troops finally withdrew from the Suez Canal Zone in 1955, and then Egypt drew closer to the communist countries, buying arms from Czechoslovakia and increasing trade with Russia. This, in the climate of the Cold War, created some alarm in Britain and the United States.

The British government found it difficult to accept the changing pattern of events in the Middle East, where for so long Britain had been powerful, if not supreme.

When the young King Hussein of Jordan dismissed General Glubb, Chief of Jordan's General Staff and Commander of the Arab Legion, thus ending Britain's tutelage of Jordan, Prime Minister Anthony Eden bitterly accused Nasser of being responsible for this further blow to waning British prestige in the Middle East. Actually the real reason why Hussein got rid of Glubb was because he wanted to rule Jordan himself, and considered Glubb's position too powerful for a foreigner to occupy in Jordan. Events have justified his action; King Hussein has turned out to be the best and perhaps the most diplomatic of the Arab rulers.

In the nineteen-fifties, the *bête noire* was Nasser, so far as England was concerned and certainly his flirtation with Communism gave cause for alarm in the western democracies. They did not realize that Nasser was only trying to play one world camp off against the other; that Communism was totally opposed to Mohammedanism and could never have taken root in Egypt. Thus when Nasser recognized Communist China, the United States in a fit of pique cancelled her loan for the Aswan Dam; Britain did the same. Far

from bringing Nasser to his knees, this not very far-sighted action merely resulted in closer ties between Egypt and Russia, who lost no time in putting up the money for the project.

Nasser's retaliation against Britain was to nationalize the Suez Canal, and seize the assets of the Canal Company, announcing that they would be used to help finance the dam. Britain, France and the United States riposted by freezing Egypt's assets and balances.

Eden believed that Nasser constituted the same sort of danger to peace as Hitler had done in the thirties, and that to appease him would be wrong, as the appeasement of Hitler had been wrong. He said to Anthony Nutting, his Minister of State for Foreign Affairs: "I want him destroyed. I want him removed."* Eden banned the export of war material to Egypt, mobilized 20,000 army reservists, and reinforced the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force in the eastern Mediterranean.

He told President Eisenhower that Britain was ready to use force to "bring Nasser to his senses", and sought American support to bring the Suez Canal under international control. The retired warrior in the White House, however, did not react favourably to the suggestion of breaking Nasser by force. The mood of America and the United Nations was for peace by negotiation. Only London and Paris were out of step.

John Foster Dulles, America's Secretary of State, was certainly in favour of "making Nasser disgorge", but force should be used only at the last resort, he said. Eden wrongly took this as a hint that he had Washington behind him in his determination to destroy Nasser. He did not perceive that, with a presidential election in the offing, Eisenhower was not likely to sanction any kind of warlike adventures in the Middle East. America's wounds in Korea were too recent.

The French were just as keen as Eden to topple Nasser and make him disgorge the Canal. And so they approached Egypt's most determined foe, Israel.

Israel was at first reluctant, despite the obvious advantage to her of Britain and France seizing the Canal and granting Israeli ships the right to use it. Ben Gurion, Israel's Prime Minister, thought Egypt's quarrel was with Britain and France. All the same, Israel was having a lot of trouble with the Egyptian terrorists in the Gaza

**No End of a Lesson* by Anthony Nutting (Constable 1967).

Strip, and Egyptian gun emplacements commanded the Tiran Strait through which ships had to sail to Eilat, Israel's only port with access to the Red Sea.

Ben Gurion insisted on an important condition. If Israel was to invade Egypt, then she would have to have protection against being bombed by Nasser's air force which was formidably equipped with Russian MIGs and Ilyushins. It was agreed that only Britain had an air base (Cyprus) sufficiently close to Egypt to do this.

What would Great Britain do if Israel were to attack Egypt? the Frenchmen asked. Eden was interested, though non-committal, for he was an old hand at the game of diplomacy. Egypt being attacked by Israel certainly gave rise to interesting possibilities.

The French thought that Anglo-French intervention should take the form of a seaborne invasion of Port Said, and a parachute operation to occupy Suez and Ismalia, which latter place was the Canal's administrative headquarters. It was also necessary for the R.A.F. to neutralize the Egyptian Air Force on the ground. This was Israel's stipulation.

It was an ingenious scheme, more suited perhaps to the political atmosphere of the nineteenth than the twentieth century. No one could pretend that it was in tune with the ideals purported to be held by one of the founder members of the United Nations. But one of the facts of political life is that the reality cannot often be reconciled with the ideal.

Eden, and apparently the majority of his Cabinet, agreed with the French proposal. They did so believing that what they were doing was in the national interest, and in the words of Selwyn Lloyd, who was Foreign Secretary at that time, "that it would safeguard the lives and property of British subjects and of our friends, and that the course embarked on would in the long run contribute to the stability of the Middle East". Not all members of the government agreed with this view. Some regarded it as shabby and sordid. History may judge it as being more stupid than wicked. Ben Gurion got cold feet. He did not trust the British, with their friends in the Arab world and their dependence upon Arab oil.

Eden's enthusiasm for the plan increased as the days went by. It took two meetings to persuade the Cabinet, and during the

last of these, on 25 October, while the fateful decision was being made at 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's emissaries were on their way to Paris with full assurances that not only was Britain much in favour of the plan, but that the R.A.F. would be used in force to knock out the Egyptian Air Force and prevent their bombing Israel. It was the assurance of British air strikes on Egyptian airfields which turned the scales so far as Israel was concerned. So the die was cast. The Cabinet agreed.

Nutting professed himself outraged and handed in his resignation, but was persuaded to postpone it in the interests of government unity. He knew, as other members of the government knew, that Anthony Eden was physically a sick man, on the verge of breakdown. What effect this might have had upon his political judgement is not known. In any case, Eden, now Lord Avon, has written a book justifying his action.

On the 29th Israel duly began her attack on Egypt. There was of course intense world reaction, particularly in the United States. At Westminster members of the Opposition were already smelling a rat, and when Eden sent the ultimatums to Israel and Egypt without even consulting Eisenhower, there was uproar in Parliament as well as extreme anger in the White House. The Security Council was hastily summoned and the United States put forward a cease-fire resolution which was promptly vetoed by Britain and France, which further widened the breach between the White House and Downing Street.

The Anglo-French folly continued in splendid isolation, and when their ultimatums were predictably accepted by Israel and rejected by Egypt, the R.A.F. took off and, in a masterly exercise of bombing skill, wiped out the Egyptian Air Force on the ground with hardly a civilian casualty – an effective piece of aggressive strategy which so impressed the Israelis that they did the same thing eleven years later in 1967 when they attacked Egypt with their own recently-acquired air force.

Assailed on all sides by angry world opinion, and with England itself divided fiercely on the issue, Eden and his already wavering Cabinet pushed on obstinately with the plan to seize the Canal. But, although the Israeli army was having great successes against the Egyptians, there was no glory for the Anglo-French forces when they landed at Port Said on 5 November.

The pressure on Britain was tremendous. There was angry opposition from Washington. Eisenhower was deeply slighted at the way he had been deceived. The United Nations called insistently and almost unanimously for a cease-fire, and branded the three recalcitrant nations as aggressors. Egypt closed the Suez Canal and there was a dangerous run on the pound.

In London the government were already beginning to lose their nerve, and there was an air of despondency and defeat even before the troops were landed at Port Said. Britain and France found that the world did not believe them when they said they were taking police action to separate the combatants.

Being accused of aggression by the world did not worry either France or Israel. The French don't mix politics with moral issues, and Israel was a young and threatened nation fighting for existence, and has been forgiven much. But Britain was seriously worried by world opinion, and placed much importance upon her reputation for international integrity. In that case, why then embark upon this shabby enterprise?

If to have fallen in with the French scheme was a mistake, to have abandoned it half-way through was an even greater one. This was the kind of international adventure which could only be justified by success. Whether its success could have had any permanency, or would have solved the problem the operation was supposed to solve is very questionable.

As it was, not one of Eden's objectives was accomplished. The Anglo-French forces were forced to withdraw in the face of outraged world opinion. The United Nations stepped in and tried to patch up the quarrel. But Nasser remained in power and Egypt retained the Canal.

Anthony Eden was struck down by illness and resigned. He never returned to political life. His Suez adventure ruined what had been a distinguished career in the field of international affairs.

It is strange that he should have so completely misjudged the situation in 1956. It seemed that every possible mistake was made. There was no consultation with the Opposition on what was after all a warlike venture. There was no consultation either with the United States, supposed to be Britain's closest ally. How could Eden have hoped to have got away with an action which antagonized opinion so violently both at home and abroad?

It was a diplomatic miscalculation which seriously damaged British interests in the Middle East at a most delicate period of its history. The bitterness engendered by Suez led directly to the five-day war between Israel and Egypt in June 1967. It poisoned the relationship between the Arab nations and the Western powers, and also damaged Britain's relations with the United States.

The Middle Eastern countries held up Eden's Suez adventure as proof that the ex-imperialist powers had not given up their bad old ways, despite the steady retreat from imperialism which had been going on all over the world.

America's great fear was communism, and she saw a danger in the Arab states' turning to Russia for aid and assistance. This Russia gave liberally in some cases, expecting great political advantage, but not getting it. Russia was as disillusioned over the Arab states as the western powers were. They discovered that Arab nationalism was a far more potent force than communism. Despite the great aid Russia gave to Nasser, Egypt still banned the Communist Party.

Israel continued to be the explosive force in the eastern Mediterranean. Bitterly wronged over Israel's unprovoked attack on her in 1956, Egypt conducted a violent cold war against the Jewish state for ten years, and indeed insisted that a state of hostilities existed between them all this time. The ban on Israel's use of the Suez Canal was continued, and only the existence of United Nations forces between them in the Negev prevented continual fighting. In the north Syria engaged in continuous frontier warfare with her Jewish neighbour.

Most provocative of all was Arab radio, which poured forth a stream of threats and vilification against Israel. The threat to destroy Israel and push her into the sea was made so persistently that Israel armed herself to the teeth and trained a highly efficient citizen army and air force. The crisis came in 1967 when Nasser closed the Tiran Strait to Israeli ships. Egyptian threats rose to a crescendo and Arab radio went beyond the limits of what Israel was prepared to endure.

On the morning of 5 June the Israeli air force struck at the Egyptian air force on the ground, in the same way as the R.A.F. had done eleven years previously, and with the same devastating effect. Within hours, the Egyptian air force had ceased to exist and

Israeli armoured forces were thrusting once more across Sinai. Israel's five day campaign was a brilliant success, and brought an ecstatic chorus of praise from military experts all over the world. The Egyptian army was utterly routed. Israeli forces reached the Suez Canal and stayed there. They also took Jerusalem, and proposed to stay there, too.

Nasser survived this supreme humiliation and remained in power. He offered to resign, but the Egyptians, bitterly mortified, clung to him rather pathetically and refused to let him go. His standing in the Arab world naturally was considerably diminished.

Nevertheless the Arab world remained, and still remains, defiant and unyielding, obstinately refusing to compromise with Israel. They had in fact well learnt the lesson of the Suez affair, which was condemned by the world, a fact which gave them enormous confidence. They knew there was a limit beyond which neither Britain, France nor Israel could go.

In 1967 Egypt knew that the world would not stand for the Israeli occupation of Cairo. If the Jewish troops had advanced across the Canal into the Delta and the heart of Egypt, there would have been a world outcry and irresistible pressure would have been brought upon Israel by the United States, upon whose bounty Israel depends.

And so the tortured situation in the Middle East remains, with the cool spirits of either side knowing that neither can win, that history cannot be undone, and that Israel is there to stay. The fault lies mainly in the unbridled nationalism of both Jew and Arab, two Semitic peoples, each with a history of which they can be proud. Both peoples have contributed richly to the sum total of human culture and progress, and it is one of the great tragedies of the age that they cannot live together in harmony.

Commenting on the Israeli war of 1967, the *Sunday Times* said: "Israel was born in sin. The sins committed against the Jews and the sins committed by and for the Jews weigh equally in its history."

No nation has been more wronged throughout the ages. The extraordinary friction between the Semitic peoples and their European neighbours has been one of the most persistent manifestations of human conflict, and it has left many dark stains upon history. It is sad that there is now war between the Semitic peoples themselves.

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Index



Biographical note

Charles Franklin was born at Leicester but was educated and has lived for most of his life in Brighton where he worked for some years as a journalist; becoming Editor of the *Brighton and Hove Gazette*. During the war, when he was serving in the R.A.F., he began to write crime novels. The first was published in 1946 and was followed by a number of novels of murder, suspense and espionage, plays for radio and television, and short stories. He has also written a number of factual books dealing with history as well as the various facets of crime.

In 1962–63 he was Chairman of the Crime Writers' Association. His real name is Frank Usher, under which name he has written several novels, and he lives at Hove with his wife who is also an author.

